

Asia Connections

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



Fall 2007

From the Director

With internationalization firmly on the University's agenda, links with Asia seem to be expanding exponentially. The significance of internationalization was emphasized with the official opening of the FedEx Global Education Center on October 12. This building brings together a range of the University's international programs, with the Carolina Asia Center located on the 3rd floor.

Fittingly, with this issue of *Asia Connections*, we highlight the experiences of faculty and students living, working, researching and studying in Asia.

My most recent experience of internationalization came in May when I taught an undergraduate course for UNC students in Thailand. This was a research-based course for 6 students who had undertaken the first-ever Semester in Southeast Asia program, studying at Mahidol University's International College, just outside Bangkok.

Our course focused on Burmese migrant workers in Thailand – estimates are that there are more than 2 million Burmese in Thailand – and was taught in a number of locations. The group conducted research on the Thailand-Burma border (in Mae Sot and Sangkhlaburi), Mahachai, south of Bangkok, and received lectures at the Mahidol campus in Salaya. We also visited the Sukhothai Historical Park.

This experience was an extraordinary learning opportunity for the students. They visited factories, ports, housing and other sites where migrant workers lived and worked. It was a remarkable experience for me as I came to better understand the multiple motivations and varied expectations of our students.

When they apply for study abroad programs, we hear students saying that they want to get out of their "comfort zone." This course did that in dramatic ways, and their reactions were not always exactly as I expected. While there was a desire to get beyond the comfortable experience, there was also a degree of trepidation about this. Tourism-like experiences are relatively easy to deal with, while the challenges of intensive fieldwork and study abroad can be daunting and leaving one's the comfort zone can be personally testing. But that is as it should be.

Kevin Hewison, *Director*

The Grier/Woods Presbyterian China Initiative

The Carolina Asia Center administers the Grier/Woods Presbyterian China Initiative. The Initiative aims to further develop Chinese studies in the College of Arts and Sciences through faculty support, language instruction and study abroad opportunities. It was created through a gift to UNC in 2004 from Amy Woods Brinkley, a 1978 Carolina graduate, and her husband, Robert G. Brinkley of Charlotte.

Each year, Fellowships for Chinese Studies and Travel Grants are made, and in this issue we profile two recent recipients. To date, 4 Fellowships and 6 Travel Grants have been made.

The demand for information and teaching about China is increasing at Carolina, and the Grier/Woods Presbyterian China Initiative ensures that our faculty are able to effectively respond to this demand.

China – Urbanized Villages

Thanks to a generous travel grant made possible by The Grier/Woods Presbyterian China Initiative, Dr. Yan Song of the Department of City and Regional Planning was able to travel to China to examine its recent rapid urbanization.

In China, rural-to-urban migration is occurring on a massive scale. Dr. Song is researching villages within cities as an outcome of China's rapid urbanization. For example, Shenzhen had an official population of around 9 million in 2000, with more than 2 million living in more than 241 urbanizing villages. She is keen to understand how these urbanizing villages develop and the implications of this development for migrants, urban authorities and planners, amongst others.

With her Grier/Woods Presbyterian China Initiative Travel Grant, Dr. Song was recently able to visit more than 100 urbanizing villages in several coastal cities, including Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Hangzhou and Shanghai. All these cities have seen urban areas expand substantially over the last decade. Many previously rural areas have been surrounded by urban developments and transformed into villages within cities.

Rural migrants in these cities still encounter difficulties in acquiring urban household registration and nearly all migrants, employed mostly in low-income job sectors, are considered to be temporary residents in urban areas. This means they do not have access to many urban amenities



An urbanized setting, China. Photo by Yan Song

such as education, health care, or urban housing subsidies and that they must find ways to overcome institutional and policy constraints in seeking urban housing in addition to addressing financial issues. Dr. Song is working to understand how to improve the conditions of these urbanizing villages through careful design of redevelopment and management policies.

China – Urban Aesthetics

Dr. Robin Visser, Assistant Professor in the Asian Studies Department, was a recipient of the Grier/Woods Presbyterian China Initiative Fellowship in Chinese Studies. She spent Summer 2007 conducting research in several of China's largest cities.

The Fellowship enabled Dr. Visser to complete her research and writing for a book, *Cities Surround the Countryside: Urban Aesthetics in Postsocialist China*, currently in production with Duke University Press. The book draws on the tools of literary and cultural criticism, historiography, and urban planning to examine how the transformation of PRC cities in the past three decades has shaped the Chinese cultural imagination as manifest in contemporary fiction, film, visual art, and architecture.

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Grier/Woods

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Dr. Robin Visser

Because the fellowship enabled her to complete her project in China, Dr. Visser was able to incorporate timely recent developments and images into the final manuscript. During the Fellowship period she conducted interviews with key intellectuals, artists, journal editors, urban planners, and activists, and conducted site visits to Hong Kong, Beijing, Suzhou, Hangzhou, Lhasa, Xiamen, Quanzhou, and Yangzhou to urban development venues featured in her book.

In addition to completing the book manuscript, in spring of 2007 she also revised for publication a Chinese lecture she had delivered at her host institution, the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Shanghai University, entitled "The Imagined City: Urban Planning and Aesthetic Criticism in Contemporary China" in *Methodology and Case Studies: Collected Lectures on Cultural Studies*. In May, Dr. Visser delivered a guest lecture on Chinese urban aesthetics to New York University in Shanghai, and in June served as panel discussant in Shanghai for a Vietnam delegation at the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Conference on the topic of "Culture and Development in the Process of Urban Modernization."

Phillips Ambassador – Derek Paylor

As an Asian Studies major, I am continually amazed by the opportunities available to UNC students seeking to enrich their understanding of Asia's rich culture and its standing in the world.

Last summer, I found myself pursuing a recently-discovered interest in Chinese language and culture in Beijing, China: climbing the Great Wall, eating roasted duck, bargaining for fine silk, and pushing my broken Chinese as far as it could go. Being in Beijing a year before the Summer Olympics that will ignite the city in a fervor is has not seen in a long time, was like seeing a set constructed for a play: revealing. My short time in China left me impatient for more knowledge, and the intensity of my language studies, courtesy of instruction through CET Academic Programs and the UNC Study Abroad office, made me more determined to master the intriguing yet, to me, "un-normal" structure of Putonghua.

Studying in China enriched my UNC experience, yet what set me apart from other students in my program were my unique *ambassadorial* duties. This year, thanks to the generous donation of UNC alumnus and US Ambassador Earl "Phil" N. Phillips, I was privileged to be a part of the inaugural group of the Phillips Ambassadors, recipients of the study abroad award which explicitly focuses on students traveling to Asia, particularly those going to India and China. Before departure, Phillips Ambassadors receive a sturdy background of Asia through a retreat which features scholars from UNC and businessmen and women from the North Carolina area, and returnees conduct projects which will spread awareness of Asian interest throughout the UNC community. The Phillips Ambassadors Scholarship, supported by people whose eyes are towards the future, ensures Tar Heels can consider future possibilities in Asia.

For more information on Phillips Ambassadors, see <http://studyabroad.unc.edu/phillips/index.cfm>



Derek Paylor

Scholars in Residence

The Center has a number of resident visitors this semester. They are: Susanne Prager Nyein (a Burma specialist), Steven I. Levine (a China expert), Young Hae Choi (assistant editor at Korea's Dong-A daily newspaper), Sangwhan Lho (Professor, Department of Economics, Kyungnam University, Korea), Myung-Hee Lee (deputy general manager of Korea's Kukmin Daily), and Kengkij Kitirianglarp (a doctoral candidate at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University).

For more information, see http://www.carolinaasiacenter.unc.edu/people_scholars.html

Recent Center Speakers

The CAC has sponsored a number of talks in Fall. They have included: Dr. Susanne Prager Nyein (CAC) and Dr. Tun Kyaw Nyein (North Carolina Central University) speaking on Burma's Political Crisis, Dr. Porphant Ouyyanont (of Thailand's Sukhothai Thammathirat University) who spoke about Thailand's Crown Property Bureau, and Chris Nelson (of The Nelson Report) speaking about US foreign policy in Asia.

For more information, see <http://www.carolinaasiacenter.unc.edu/events2008fall.html>

Make a gift to the Carolina Asia Center

Your gift to the Carolina Asia Center will support a wide range of campus-wide activities to foster cutting edge research, innovative teaching, and strategic partnerships.

Please make checks payable to The Carolina Asia Center, and return your gift in the enclosed envelope.

For other ways to give, please contact Daniel Lebold, Director of Development for International Studies at 919.962.6864 or email Daniel.lebold@unc.edu.



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