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Asian Student Association Newsletter

W I N T E R 1 9 9 5

East Meets West: Culture Shock

Hamza Suria

Although any individual that moves to a 'foreign' culture would experience some degree of cultural shock, this effect is most pronounced for those of Asian origin. The underlying reason for this is the incomparable amount of culture and tradition present within Asia. This is a sadly lacking quality in many other parts of the world, hence there is a great challenge for Asians to settle elsewhere.

Asia is profoundly recognized for the rooting of its society within cultural and traditional models. Life in Asian societies is based on a structured set of values, which all reflect upon a healthy form of communitarian living. Although these values are not exactly the same for each society, their basic focus has been to foster a sense of sharing and responsibility within each member of the society. Accompanying this in Asian societies has been the appreciation of historical events as the shaping of the societies future.

Looking beyond Asia, one observes societies shaped by different principles. Asia is able to emphasize tradition because most of its individuals are a part of its tradition. Therefore, when one observes more eclectic regions of the world, such as the United States, there is little common tradition that society can be based on. While individuals have been gathering in these eclectic areas for centuries, they have each brought a small piece of their individual traditions. Each of these little pieces has combined to form a novel, dynamically-varying society that reflects no particular tradition alone. Thus, there can be little sense of shared historical significance between these people, and no one set of social principles can be super-imposed onto the whole population.

Therefore it is not surprising to hear 'foreigners', such as myself, who come to the non-traditional American society from a much more historically shaped lifestyle. Our culture shock is fairly pronounced initially while there is confusion as to what American societies value. Eventually one realizes that social values can vary widely between the individuals in America, and most of the values present among the population have been 'rubbed-out' due to their conflict among other members of the population. Sometimes there is also the feeling among 'foreigners' that they are also losing the traditional reasoning which shaped their lives in the past.



**Thank You for Your
Continued Support.**

A.S.A.

Eric Schwartz K'97, Jodi Schmaltz K'97, Manish Garg K'97

A culture of REVOLUTION

Kevin Sievert

Things still have not changed. Will they ever? I do not see a multicultural revolution in the near future, especially on a campus with students and faculty who demand multiculturalism, but do nothing to further the cause. I used to get angry about the apathy that exists and would vent my anger in what I thought was the most appropriate manner. I believed that blatantly exposing the problems, bringing them to light, would empower students and even faculty to speak up and demand, not only with words, but with action, that there be change.

Empower I did not. I did however successfully aggravate certain professors that have entrenched themselves in and behind the guise of educational freedom and their tenure. One such professor explained to me his role here at Kalamazoo College. He said that it was his responsibility as a professor to tear apart the very fabric that makes up a culture and once he has done this, to then teach his students about that culture. He believes that this is the only way to learn about a culture. He believes that in this form it is possible to see the very essence of that culture. He is wrong! To do what he suggests is to base everything you say about that culture from the view point of your own culture. What he needs to do is to teach culture as a whole. It is impossible to understand a culture outside of its culture. Wars have begun for this very reason. Yet some individuals insist that their culture is superior.

A war must be waged against such professors and such beliefs, but now I believe that supporting those faculty and staff that are working for change is most important. I would like to acknowledge the efforts of those professors that understand that culture is important and that it is not any one individuals right to put his or her culture above others.

The following three professors stand out in

my mind, but are not alone.

Dr. Reinert - *Truely in support of multiculturalism. He is the only Prof. that I have had a "K" that even acknowledged Dr. Martin Luther Kings birthday. He also worked to organize, with Dr. Prigg, the LACC event commemorating MLK's birthday and is now working on student retention.*

Dr. Baraka-Love - *As Director of Multicultural Affairs she has helped students in every way possible, worked with students to implement change, and has worked to right the injustices that have plagued this campus, often without the reward or the praise that she deserves.*

Dr. Ford - *Everyone needs to take Psychology of Prejudice. He is one of the few Profs. that I have found to be completely candid about the sensitive issues surrounding racism and prejudice.*

These individuals are what is good about Kalamazoo College. If you think of "K" as a culture these professors are what is good about "K" culture. Looking at "K" culture as a whole, it is also possible to see what it is that is good and bad about this culture, but you cannot tear it apart. "K" culture should be celebrated and like every culture there is room for change, both for the good and unfortunately bad. I propose that as we move towards a more multicultural "K", that we look at the whole and aim to change the entire culture not just the components of the culture. The curriculum, the student body, the faculty and the very fabric of "K" can change and with the help of professors, faculty and students that understand this, Kalamazoo College will change for the better. If we ignore the interdependence of all of these components and view "K" as a culture that needs to be torn apart as a certain professor would argue, beware

R E V O L U T I O N.

Misunderstood

Alien to others
A woman walks
Alone.
Body concealed behind a black, shapeless, flowing garment,
Hinting at nothing,
Revealing nothing,
Veiled face
Showing only the eyes.

The eyes...
Eyes that say nothing of the blistering heat.
Everyone feels it;
Around her, people are talking about it.
And yet she says nothing,
Just sits there,
Her back ramrod stiff,
Shoulders never drooping,
Despite the sweat that forms rivulets down her back,
Despite the suffocating veil.

The eyes...
Eyes that none can ever read.
Eyes that reveal nothing of her inner self.
No visible characteristic of her suffering.
And yet she does suffer
Not because of the heat
She's used to that.
She suffers because of the remarks
The little things people say,
The glances she gets when people think she's not looking.

The ignorant people,
Those who know no better,
The ones who don't understand.
She forgives them for not knowing,
For not caring enough to know.

Her eyes reveal nothing of the hurt or the heat,
Nor of her thoughts.
People don't know why she dresses like that.
After all, they think,
This is America!
Everyone is free here.

People don't know
that for her
The veil
IS
HER
FREEDOM!

Sadaf Khattak

A Perspective on Women

Hope Nguyen

Asian women have often been scrutinized for being submissive to men. It is a common stereotype which may contain some truth but the issue is much more complex because it involves more than personal choice and freedom, but a culture and tradition which has dictated a way of life for generations of women.

It was difficult for me, living in the U.S. to figure out what kind of role I should take on as a woman. In school and among friends, I was stressed to remain strong, independent, and capable of making my own choices. I associated myself with a feminist voice and tried to prove myself to men, trying to become equal and even better. I still do to some extent.

My place at home was much different than at school. I did as I was told and never asked questions. I was hostess at home, like my mother, and catered to both my father and my brothers. At family or community functions, I would do as the other women did: help cook, set the table, and serve food. It was not unusual to find women in the kitchen, segregated from the men the entire evening. I didn't always meet these expectations of what a woman should act and often argued why? -why do I always have to do the dishes while they get to watch tv? -why do I always have to ask my aunt if she needs help in the kitchen even when I'm a guest? -why don't you pamper me like them, Why do I always have to do everything for myself?

I felt that my parents never treated me the same as my other siblings because I was a girl. I had stricter rules to abide by and although my father tried to make things "equal" I was never satisfied. It wasn't until my later years in high school and college that I realized who I was and how my upbringing had affected me. I am much more independent and I like doing work by myself because I know it'll get done. I now find myself very much like my mother, a hostess. I enjoy making food for people and making them comfortable and happy. People who know me, know how I am. I don't mind cleaning up after people. It's not a duty or obligation to me, it makes me happy. Of course not all the time, but I don't expect anything in

return. I realize that I may tend or seem to be submissive and too nice at times. My actions do fall into the typical stereotype of an Asian woman but I don't think that hinders me in any way or makes me any less of a person. I don't have a personal vendetta against men, especially my father. I probably have the greatest respect for him.

The way I was raised was not how my mother or father was raised in Vietnam, but they've instilled some of the same traditions and customs that may be regarded as "patriarchal" and "anti-woman." Like some Asian women, I do not feel as if my freedoms are controlled or that I'm being manipulated. The tendencies to put others before myself is a part of me as it is a part of my mother. I think many Asian women are comfortable with the role they take on in the household and as a wife and mother. It makes them happy. Most of them are not just "barefoot and pregnant" but have successful careers outside the home.

Maybe the reason why I feel comfortable in my home and with my father is that there is a foundation of respect that is built in the family structure. I receive the same respect as my father does and he recognizes my opinions and we often find ourselves discussing problems over the dinner table. My parents have the same respect for each other which can't be seen by their actions or words but it is there and it is mutual. My friends never understood why I put up with the strict rules, early curfews, and unreasonable punishments which my brothers didn't have to adhere to, but I don't mind anymore. I'm sure women who have grown up in a similar background understand and can relate.

The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual writers and do not reflect the views of the association as a whole.

We'd like to thank all those who submitted articles and welcome other students and faculty to share their opinions. If you'd like to contribute, please feel free to send responses to our mailbox in the basement of Hicks Center. We would also like to encourage interested individuals to our meetings in the Spring.

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ASA Dinner— Good Food, Asian Style



(left) Brett Hunter K'96, Jason Wold K'95, Rich Utarnachitt K'96, Madhu Gadam K'96, Shoko Maeda K'98, Kevin Sievert K'95

On Sunday evening at six pm., the Trowbridge Main Lounge was the place to be if tasty food and good music were your ideas of a good time. What made this Sunday so different from any other Sunday? The ASA Potluck, of course!

Whether the attraction was the food or the music, those who came appeared to enjoy the delicious food as well as each other's company. Part of the appeal could have been the variety of Asian dishes on the menu, or the loud, new age, Indian music that didn't quite remain in the background. The food consisted of anything from the ordinary— plain rice— to the extraordinary— crab meat rangoons and mango lassee. It seemed like every part of Asia was represented in the food. And best of all, the potluck brought back the feeling of home cooking. In case you wondered, all that truly scrumptious food was cooked by ASA members who slaved for hours and hours to bring you eating excitement! (Everything except for the catered samosas.)

The ASA Potluck, although a social event, has become a tradition over the quarters. The potluck is a chance for the Asian Student Association to be visible in the social setting, and also provides an inexpensive way for students to experience the rich flavor of Asia. It's also a good study break around ninth week time, besides being a lot of fun.

Many thanks to everyone who took the time to come to our small feast on Sunday, and especially to those who made it possible by cooking the wonderful food. And for those of you who missed it this quarter, there's always Spring!

The Progress of Vietnam

Hope Nguyen

My friend's father recently brought to my attention a letter which he received from his friend, Chuck Searcy, who is living in Vietnam and working at the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation in Hanoi. This letter gives me a great sense of identity for the country that I have never known. I would like to share one passage especially:

"The long-awaited demolition of the Hoa Lo Prison, the Hanoi Hilton, has begun with a gaping hole knocked in the wall on Hai Ba Trung Street and a metal gate installed for the construction trucks to roll in and out. They plan to retain a section of the prison as a museum, to capture the historic significance of the place. It's like the Berlin Wall, marking the passing of an era— not from socialism or communism to capitalism, necessarily, but from colonialism to independence. The prison was built by the French and used for decades to torture and murder Vietnamese revolutionaries."

Mr. Searcy speaks a lot about how capitalism has affected the country. The cities are growing and technology is flooding into the rural communities who live by growing rice. He doesn't seem to sense corruption as he paraphrases his friend Tran Hoa who,

"has become quite the believer in capitalism, because it offers greater opportunity for achievement and fulfillment, but he thinks the Canadians and the Swedes have a more balanced and humane approach to social programs. He's convinced that Vietnam now has a great opportunity to select from all economic and social systems that will work best for his country."

There is more to his letter but it is too long to print. If anyone is interested I have a copy which you could read. Just call or stop by my room. I am very excited, now more than ever, because I have some direction in my life. I was planning to go back to Vietnam to document my family's immigration as my SIP but I know that I can do much more. Vietnam has come a long way like many Vietnamese immigrants in the States have. Many are returning home and I will too, to the country I never knew.



(top) Manish Garg K'97, Hope Nguyen K'97, Anjalee Deshpande K'95, Ashish Patel K'97
Hamza Suria K'97, Madhu Gadam K'96, Rich Utarnachitt K'96, Sadaf Khattak K'97