

‘A DOOR HAS OPENED’

EXETER FACULTY MEMBERS REFLECT ON
THEIR THREE-WEEK STUDY TOUR OF CHINA

By Johanna Maranto

Ask the 16 Exeter faculty members who took part in a three-week study tour of China this past summer to describe the experience, and they speak with a single heartfelt voice. It was, they agree, “amazing,” “incredible,” even “overwhelming.” It was also, they add, among the most enriching experiences of their professional lives.

“The longer I’m back home,” says English instructor Jane Cadwell, “the more I realize the depth and breadth of the experience. It helped me as a teacher to be a student.”

Before the trip, says English instructor Lark Hammond, “China to me seemed very abstract and very far away. Now it feels very real and manageable—except for the language, which poses a hurdle to deeper connections and understanding. I know better now what I’m curious about, including the role of women as China moves into the 21st century.”

The June 21 to July 14 trip was sponsored by the East-West Center (EWC), an education and research organization based in Honolulu. EWC seeks to strengthen ties between the United States and countries in the Asian Pacific region, and to increase Westerners’ understanding of Asian history and culture.

Instrumental in arranging the program was Philip Loughlin ’57; ’76 (Hon.), a former Academy trustee who now serves on the EWC board. Loughlin previewed the faculty’s itinerary on a preparatory trip to China last spring and then accompanied the actual study tour, which EWC administrators tailored to meet the group’s interests.

“If a student goes to China,” notes Loughlin, “that student benefits from the experience. If you take a teacher to China, there is a great magnifying impact.” Having a group of teachers from a single institution traveling together, sharing ideas on how best to bring their experiences into their classrooms, should, Loughlin adds, magnify that impact even more.

The trip was further enhanced by extensive



Trip participants included (from left) Lundy Smith, Liz Katz, Denis Brochu, Jane Cadwell, Joseph Reiter (seated), Betsy Stevens, Mark Delaney, Jeanne Allen, Tom Ramsey (partially hidden), Phil Loughlin ’57, Barbara Eggers, Rob Morris, Karen Burgess Smith, Ming Fontaine, Bill Jordan. Not shown: Matt Brenner.

the group traveled to Beijing, Nanjing and Shanghai, where Harold Brown ’74, Exeter’s director of alumni/ae affairs, organized a series of receptions. In Beijing, Mary and Gee Pei ’72; P’06, P’09 hosted a traditional Chinese dinner with their extended family. “We heard over and over from alums, ‘We’re so glad the Academy is doing this,’” says Lundy Smith, an English teacher.

Alumni/ae who live and work in China shared their insights into the rapidly evolving country. Architect Chris Choa ’77 offered a detailed analysis of Shanghai’s dramatic development boom, explaining the historical significance of the city’s architecture and the ways that culture and religion can dictate contemporary building codes—including a requirement that building entrances be situated on a north-south axis, regardless of practical considerations.

The juxtaposition of old and new was a constant theme, and one that defines contemporary China. A dinner in Shanghai hosted by Ming Chen ’85 was held in an elegant club that was once, in a very different era, the British Consulate. From excursions to the Great Wall to forays into city shopping districts jammed with knock-off Rolex watches and Gucci bags, the Exeter faculty experienced this dichotomy firsthand.

For history teacher Bill Jordan, that was especially true of

support from Exeter alumni/ae and parents. In all, the group attended 25 different seminars and presentations, beginning in Honolulu with a three-day immersion in Chinese history, philosophy, religion, politics, economic development, family and the Cultural Revolution. David McCraw, father of Cliff McCraw ’02 and a professor of East Asian languages and literature at the University of Hawaii, spoke with the faculty about Chinese literature.

That same level of alumni/ae support and enthusiasm continued as



Alumni/ae like architect Chris Choa ’77 shared their insights into the rapidly evolving country.



Eggers and Fontaine presented Loughlin with a thank-you note from the group: a hand-painted scroll.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KAREN BURGESS SMITH



Visits to three schools offered the faculty a firsthand look at the Chinese educational system.

pajamas. Their sinks are outside. They've set up storefronts every 10 feet. At one stand people are buying live fish from basins. Next to that, a young girl is washing her hair and someone else is plucking a duck. People live *and* work there."

That neighborhood will soon disappear, both victim and beneficiary of modernization, as urban China trades its old ways for new. "What's going on in China right now went on in America 100 years ago," says Jordan. "It's right there in front of you. These neigh-



China's tremendous growth has had its consequences, including significant air and water pollution.

borhoods remind me of descriptions of New York City during the Industrial Revolution." That revolution could be glimpsed in a visit to the Practical Skills Training Center for Rural Women, where teenage girls plucked from rural poverty are trained as waitresses, hairdressers and word processors. The visit was arranged by Phyllis Chang '75, a former program officer with the Ford Foundation and the founder of China Law and Development Consultants, which supports nonprofit development work and citizens rights. "For me," says Lark Hammond, "that was one of the most moving places we visited. The school's president, Wu Qing, was a very powerful, impressive woman, but it was clear that her passion for her work on behalf of women was motivated by love. That was evident everywhere at the school, especially in the faces of the students, who cling with a fierce joy to this chance to escape a life of poverty and subservience."

In Nanjing, the group took an eye-opening tour of a recently

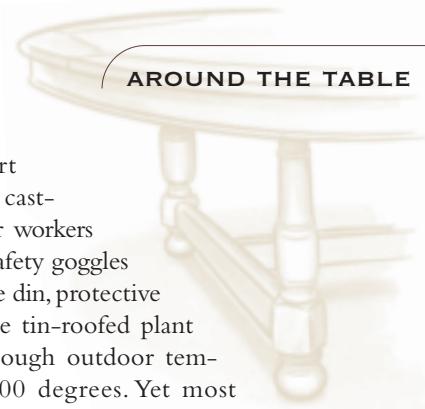
constructed factory on the city's outskirts. There, workers squatted on dirt floors, hand-assembling cast-iron meat grinders. Other workers machined parts without safety goggles or, despite the considerable din, protective headphones. Nor was the tin-roofed plant air-conditioned, even though outdoor temperatures climbed to 100 degrees. Yet most reports indicate that workers accept such conditions as a tradeoff for a reliable source of income.

Health and safety are not the only issues awaiting attention as China hurtles into the 21st century. "Economic growth has significantly improved the quality of life and standard of living for a significant portion of the population," notes science instructor Betsy Stevens. "But the question is whether China can maintain such growth without catastrophic environmental consequences." Car ownership has increased dramatically in China, and city streets once crowded with bicycles are now jammed with cars. The faculty's Shanghai itinerary included a tour of a GM plant, which employs three shifts of 1,000 workers each to keep up with the relentless demand.

Except for when crossing the perilously crowded streets, Dean of Faculty Barbara Eggers says the group felt quite safe throughout their trip. They also benefited from Chinese hospitality and courtesy, like the time Eggers had trouble purchasing a calling card and a Chinese woman stepped forward to offer her the use of her cell phone. Unable to find a taxi after attending the Peking Opera, Jane Cadwell and her three faculty companions stopped at a gas

(continued on page 106)

AROUND THE TABLE



1905



2005

Our Back Pages:
Principal O'Donnell Visits Asia



Another door to the East opened in 1995 when Principal Kendra Stearns O'Donnell (center) became the first Exeter principal to visit Asia on an official Academy trip, as reported in the fall 1995 *Bulletin*. Together with James Theisen (second from right) and Anne-Marie Samway (right) of the alumni/ae affairs and development office, O'Donnell traveled to Hong Kong and Korea, meeting with alumni/ae and parents, including Dr. Sang J. Kim P'95 (left) and Ambassador Jungwon A. Kim '56 (second from left).

China Trip

(continued from page 7)

station to ask for walking directions. Instead of directions, they got a ride from a Beijing resident who recognized their plight.

Visits to three Chinese schools gave the faculty a glimpse of the cultural challenges Asian students may encounter at the Academy. The schools the faculty toured featured lecture-style classes of 60 students who were attentive but largely silent—a marked contrast to the Harkness system, in which active student participation is encouraged, if not demanded.

“What aspects of the Harkness classroom might be familiar to and comfortable to our Asian students?” asks Jeanne Stern, head counselor at the Lamont Health and Wellness Center. “Where might there be obstacles? How might teachers understand a more reticent student?”

While the study tour is over, what the group learned will “continue to unfold over time,” says Eggers, as faculty members write reflections on their trip and make presentations to the trustees and their faculty colleagues. They will also discuss how all their China experiences might filter into Exeter’s programs. It’s a process that will necessarily take time and consideration, says Director of Studies Mark Delaney, himself a member of study tour. But, he adds, “a door has been opened.”

For additional photographs of alumni/ae-sponsored gatherings in Hawaii and China, see “From Every Quarter,” pages 64-65.

Tbilisi

(continued from page 11)

their M.A. work in education at Harvard and Simmons College. In the process, I had become a mentor and friend to many of

these teachers, and they appreciated the fact that I could connect them with both the United States and with Europe.

Watching the students, I was reminded that it takes time to fully appreciate the Harkness method. While many of the ninth graders were still bewildered by the process, the seniors I observed were very proficient. It was also clear how much they have come to value this new way of learning, as have their parents. The seniors’ poise and thoughtful curiosity, coupled with their teachers’ patience and laserlike precision, were inspiring to behold. Amid an educational system still struggling to shake off the influence of Soviet-era bureaucracy, with its required national lesson plans and supervisory strangleholds, AAT is a small miracle of independence, and a model for interdisciplinary learning and the humanities.

I left Tbilisi on March 2, too early to attend ATT’s first graduation ceremony, which took place on May 27. It was a proud moment for AAT and for all of Georgia (so much so that Georgia’s president, Mikhail Saakashvili attended). It was also a proud moment for Exeter. Two ATT graduates are now at Harvard on full scholarships, and others are attending various American, European and Russian universities. In June, having seen the school through its crucial formative years, Don Thomas retired and was succeeded by Richard Lussen of Northfield-Mt. Hermon, as part of AAT’s long-term plan for an American school head and an American-trained, Georgian-born faculty.

Will Harkness in Tbilisi continue to thrive? I am sure of it. The faculty meets regularly around a (very big) Harkness table, and is already in the process of reviewing AAT’s curriculum for the year 2009. And an effort is underway to build a new res-

idential campus. As for Exeter, I hope more of our teachers and students will have opportunities to participate in the evolution of this Harkness of the East.

Werner Brandes is the Lane

Bicentennial Professor in the

Humanities Emeritus. A member of

modern languages department from

1964 to 2004, he was also the long-

time director of the Washington

Intern Program.