

**Guest Contributor:**

**Michael S. Steinberg**

Data currently being collected by the Institute of International Education indicates that in 1989-90 only five percent of students from the U.S. who studied abroad opted for a study program in Asia. There is a general perception that a mastery of Japanese, Chinese, Korean and Thai requires a commitment of time and effort that many students are simply unwilling to make. This is borne out by tracking student interest in these languages; enrollment patterns on many campuses show that the numbers registering for first-year Japanese, for example, may be high, but so is the subsequent attrition rate. The cost to students and institutions of running programs in many parts of Asia is no bargain either. Even in lower cost countries, most U.S. universities do not want to run programs without a Resident Director, which obviously adds to the cost.

**What are the major study abroad sites in Asia now?**

Japan is probably the most popular, although complicated to work with. The PRC saw a boom of program development in the 1980s, which coincided with concerns over the future of Hong Kong as a study abroad site. Taiwan, Korea, Thailand and Singapore are now increasing in popularity, as is Indonesia. One of the oldest programs is the year in India sponsored by the University of Wisconsin, begun in 1961, but India is not high on U.S. university agendas for study abroad. Aside from the cross cultural benefits of study in Asia, the advantages of study in non-Western study sites are now often linked in the minds of many U.S. institutions to those countries which have gained high visibility as strategic for the economic future of the United States.

**We all know about the high cost of study in Japan, but what are other drawbacks?**

It depends whether you wish to create a group program for your students, with your own curriculum and director, or use one of the many Japanese university programs for foreigners. The former model can be a quagmire of management problems for Americans used to calling the shots. The Institute of Asian Studies (IAS) has found that Japanese institutions today are reluctant to give over any

control to the U.S. institution. This makes it hard for the U.S. institution to set up a study center with special courses designed for the American group in affiliation with a Japanese university.

**What about the traditional "Courses for Foreigners" route that has worked so well for us in European universities?**

There are, of course, many well known programs, such as those at Waseda, Sophia, Nanzan and Kansai Gaidai Universities, to name a few, to which U.S. university students could apply directly. Now, however, there is increasing pressure to link admission of U.S. students to reciprocal exchange links or established programs. Additional pressure for space from Japanese students at all Japanese universities also is having an impact.

**How much do we need to worry about quality control when establishing programs in Japan?**

Concern about academic rigor is always an issue when the responsibility for instruction is placed in other hands. It is necessary to make it clear that we do indeed expect our students to learn through formal instruction, especially when the overseas host institution feels its role is primarily to make sure our students "enjoy their stay." Again, cultural constraints make it difficult to tell Japanese instructors how to teach our students.

**What is the role of the Japanese language in concerns about academics?**

Effective language teaching is always a concern--specifically, the need to find faculty who understand the language learning needs of non-native students. Here, U.S. institutional collaboration can play a most constructive role by promoting faculty interchange. An example is the Great Lakes Colleges Association program at Doshisha University in Kyoto, which brought Japanese instructors to the U.S. to be trained at member



*Michael S. Steinberg is The Vice President of the Institute of European and of Asian Studies in Chicago. An historian, he joined the Institute in 1976. In 1991-92, the Institute will send approximately 128 students on its programs in Beijing, Taipei, Nagoya, Tokyo, Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia.*

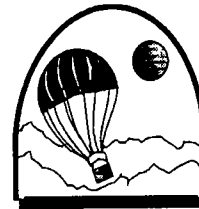
colleges. Nanzan University reached out to hire Japanese who were teaching at U.S. universities to train their own teachers. In Japan there is also the additional difficulty of finding enough faculty able to teach in English that our students can understand. Since many programs teach area studies courses in English, this can be a highly sensitive diplomatic issue.

### Let's switch to study in China. What are the differences between programming in mainland China and in Taiwan?

After the boom of new programs that started in China in the 1980s, Tiananmen Square caused some serious rethinking by U.S. universities. While many programs have resumed operations, the current political climate in China has made a difference. It is now harder to deal with institutions there. Our students no longer have Chinese roommates or classmates, at least not "openly." Furthermore, because of the "iron rice bowl" policy of guaranteeing jobs to all state employees, it is hard to unload ineffective teachers. The key to programming in China has always been to have a Resident Director who is a very skillful negotiator, and that is true now more than ever.

Taiwan, on the other hand, has opened up a great deal. Academic freedom is pronounced these days, and the Taiwanese are proficient at teaching Chinese to foreigners. Many Asianists have argued that Taiwan is a better place to study Chinese anyway, if only for cultural reasons. It is here that students will encounter traditional Chinese culture, old family customs, and religious expressions. There are now a large variety of programs available in Taiwan, ranging from the "Cadillac" of all programs, run by Stanford, which offers advanced students a one-on-one opportunity for language training, to direct enrollment for beginners at the Mandarin Training Center at National Taiwan Normal University.

We hear so much about Singapore as a westernized Asian nation. What kind of experiences can our students expect to have if they choose that option over China or Taiwan?



Singapore's National University is an English language university. Like the University of Hong Kong, it offers an excellent educational experience within a British system. But we are talking about a multi-ethnic Asian society which is deceptively modern and "western" in appearance. Although there is the undeniable appeal of being able to study in regular classes with nationals of the country and move around in a multinational community, students need to be well prepared for this experience in a non-Western culture.

### What about Korea?

There are some concerns about political unrest, but it offers a promising study site for U.S. students. It is less expensive than Japan. Yonsei University in Seoul has been a successful study site for Asian Studies programs, and has a good summer school.

### Where is the easiest place for new programs in Asia?

Thailand is proving to be a most receptive country in this respect, and universities there seem to be able to creatively meet the needs of U.S. students.

### What other concerns are there about study in Asia?

Gender role issues need to be explained to our students. Women (particularly those seeking internships in Korea's business world) notice that they need to conform to a different point of view about a woman's place. Our Japanese-American and Korean-American women students have reported being the victims of a "double whammy" in this respect. Their American "assertiveness" is resented by men in these countries.

### What do you see in the future for study abroad in Asia?

We all agree that there are not enough South Asian programs or enough interested students in all Asian programs. The growth of Asian immigration to the United States may lead to a larger interest in study in Asia. Asian-American students are increasingly participating in study programs abroad. The Institute of Asian Studies has noticed, for example, an increasing number of Americans of Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese descent on programs in Japan.

More graduate programs are moving into establishing business programs in Japan. We need to encourage more professional school contacts and interest in Asia for their students and we need to encourage reciprocal exchanges that include students and faculty at all levels. Only in this way can we encourage the understanding and confidence in the educational experiences that we feel are so important for our own students in the years ahead. ■