
ASIAN STUDIES CENTER

FALL 2011

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

Director's Note

Director Siddharth Chandra writes about Asia and its growing global presence.

Featured Story

Professor Sean Pue tells us how technology has improved the way students learn languages.

Spotlights

Alumni, Faculty, and Students are highlighted in this issue for their work in and related to Asia.



Director's Note



A Glimpse into the Future

If the developments of the past two decades are any indication, the rise of Asia in the coming decades is likely to be nothing short of meteoric. Home to over 50 percent of the world's population, Asia has always played an important role in the global economy and world history and politics. As the populations of Asia grow back into the prosperity some of them enjoyed in times past, the continent as a whole is poised to become the epicenter of global economic activity and, perhaps, even politics. This development presents significant opportunities for people around the world, both within and outside Asia. For those who live in Asia, large numbers of people will naturally partake of the new-found prosperity and prominence of the region. For those of us who live far away from this hub of activity, the opportunities will benefit people who consciously and strategically choose to engage with Asia on a variety of levels, from the intellectual to the academic to the economic, cultural, and social.

Within this broad context, the Asian Studies project at Michigan State University is a valuable asset for all the members of our 50,000-plus strong community who have, do, or would like to engage with Asia. With 23 Asian languages on the books (some offered on demand, and approximately 15 languages being actively taught at any given time) MSU has one of the most comprehensive and diverse language programs for people seeking to engage with Asia at its most basic level. Language is a critical vehicle for culture, and knowledge of language, as any linguistically diverse person is likely to attest, is uniquely capable of building personal connections and breaking down barriers to international understanding.

As the 21st century unfolds, young Americans are going to find, with increasing frequency, that their career paths are likely to lead through one or more of the many cultures that comprise Asia. Some will spend their entire careers in China, India, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, or elsewhere. Others may be posted in Asia for a few months or years. Still others may never leave the shores of the USA and still be in regular contact with people from this vast region. In all of these cases, intimate knowledge of the languages, cultures, societies, and other attributes of Asia is likely to build an enduring foundation for deeper understanding, stronger friendships and, ultimately, even career advancement for those who invest their time and effort in acquiring this knowledge. With this in mind, I invite readers of our newsletter to get involved in learning about and advancing learning about Asia among the MSU community and beyond.



Siddharth Chandra

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Featured Story



New Technology Changes the face of Language Instruction

In the Fall of 2011, Professor Sean Pue launched a website that may very well change the way languages are taught here at MSU. With the help of a his teaching assistant, Vishwajeet Singh, Sean received a grant from the federally funded South Asian Language Resource Center to develop Hindi-Urdu Blended Teaching Resources. This website, called hindiurdu.net, is hosted by the College of Arts and Letters and includes a collection of teaching videos aimed at students of differing proficiency levels, as well as a tutorial on writing in Hindi script.

Making study mobile

The development of this site takes into consideration the student population's propensity for utilizing digital materials.

“In my experience, students these days have no hesitancy in using digital materials and frequently prefer them to printed works,” said Sean, making this site the perfect tool for language instruction at the university.

The site is host to many options for students, all of which can also be viewed on a mobile device, such as an iPhone or iPad. “Many undergraduates these days are more comfortable with cell phones and tablets than with computers, and so we worked to make sure we could reach students in their comfort zone, while also making the materials available to older devices,” said Sean.

Not only does this technology allow a student to take their learning experience on the road, but it also provides a unique set of tools to enhance and strengthen their language learning. One such tool is the array of instructional videos that were filmed across MSU’s campus, one featuring a CATA bus and another a local Indian grocery store, but all starring students, faculty and community members. When asked what makes these videos even more unique, Sean said, “There are not many teaching videos available that focus on proficiencies and even fewer that use more natural language. Most of the videos on our site are loosely scripted, allowing students to be exposed to Hindi and Urdu as they are actually spoken.”

The next step

While this technology is currently being used for the teaching of Hindi and Urdu, there are endless options for its spread across other languages. “The technology can certainly be redeployed for other languages,” says Sean, “we built in a generic ‘language’ field within the widgets we developed in order to allow for that possibility.”

With the success of Sean’s classes there is no telling how many students will be utilizing these programs across MSU’s campus as the semesters pass. However, for Sean, teaching language has been about much more than the development of this program. “I feel that learning another language is a vital component of developing a sense of global citizenship” he said, a sentiment well supported by the Asian Studies Center.

Want to learn more about our Less Commonly Taught Languages Program?
Visit: <http://linglang.msu.edu/lctl>

To support these languages and the work of Professor’s like Sean Pue please
visit: <http://asia.isp.msu.edu/supportus.htm>



Professor Sean Pue

Student Spotlight



Sam Kilberg

A Gilman Scholar and A Dream Trip to China

When Junior Sam Kilberg's father lost his job and his mother went on Peritoneal Dialysis, he thought his dreams of studying in China would have to take a backseat to the trials of real life. However, in late February of 2011 Sam made the choice to apply for the U.S. State Department Gilman International Scholarship. By April, Sam was informed that he had been awarded the full scholarship of \$2,000, with an added \$3,000 because Mandarin Chinese is one of the critical languages identified by the U.S. Government. This scholarship, as well as an endowment from the Michigan State University Federal Credit Union, allowed Sam to take part in the study abroad program "Chinese Language and Culture" in Harbin China. This program sends students to study for eight weeks at the Harbin Institute of Technology, with twenty hours a week in Chinese language class and four hours in Chinese culture courses.



Receiving the Gilman Scholarship has left a lasting impression on Sam. “I can truly say that from this moment on, whatever success I have in my life will be able to be traced back to being named a U.S. State Department Gilman International Scholar,” reflects Sam. “After returning from my study abroad trip to China, I know that I am a changed man. I have a whole new perspective on life that includes how much I took for granted; having tap water that you can drink, air conditioning that doesn’t give you a headache, a dryer for my clothes and a soft bed to sleep in.”

However, Sam has returned home with more than an increased knowledge of the Chinese language and culture. Along with his suitcases he has brought back many lasting memories. “The best memory I took away from my time in China was climbing to Lotus Peak,” says Sam. “It is the highest peak on Yellow Mountain in Southeast China. It is covered in a foggy haze and mist for 200 days of the year, however, while we were climbing down from the peak we felt a cool breeze and all of a sudden the sky started to shift and the clouds parted ways. We were then looking outward at the most beautiful view I had ever seen—before our eyes appeared deep valleys and mountains engulfed by a white river of clouds. Our tour guide told us that she had worked there for two years, climbed the mountain upwards of 300 times and had only seen the view we were looking at twice.”

With this amazing experience now behind him, Sam plans to continue to pursue his interest in China, hoping to one day have the opportunity to spend time studying law there. “Studying in China was something I very much enjoyed and would like to experience many times throughout my life and profession. Without question, my future career will be associated with China in a way that will allow me to return there and participate in international relations.” And, for all those students considering a trip abroad, Sam has a piece of advice: “go out and experience the local life, talk to the taxi driver, haggle with the vendors, and engage in local establishments. This is the way you will truly learn the language you are studying and understand the culture you are living in.”

To learn more about study abroad options in Asia please visit: <http://studyabroad.isp.msu.edu/>

Faculty Spotlight



A Piece of MSU History Re-emerges

A piece of MSU history becomes a part of the future

Professor Charles Keith came to Michigan State University knowing it would be the perfect place to continue following his passion of studying Vietnam, and perhaps do a great deal more. Charles, now an assistant professor of South East Asian History, teaches a number of classes on Asia through the History Department. When asked what he hopes to achieve through his teaching here at MSU, his answer is simple and straightforward, “One thing you hope to do is teach students something concrete about a place that they don’t know anything about. Learning about the past can answer a lot of questions about the present... there are so many lessons in the past.”

A look into the past

Professor Keith has spent the majority of his academic career studying Vietnam and continues that work here at MSU. However, his current project also includes a piece of MSU history. In the mid-1950s MSU contracted with the United States government to undertake a number of projects in agricultural development, administration and police training in the new nation of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). This program, known as the Michigan State University Group (MSUG), did not produce the desired result of a stable, self-sufficient state in South Vietnam, and the American Military involvement in the country brought a large amount of controversy to the university's activities. Due to the controversy, the vast amount of research and information collected during MSUG has been virtually ignored.

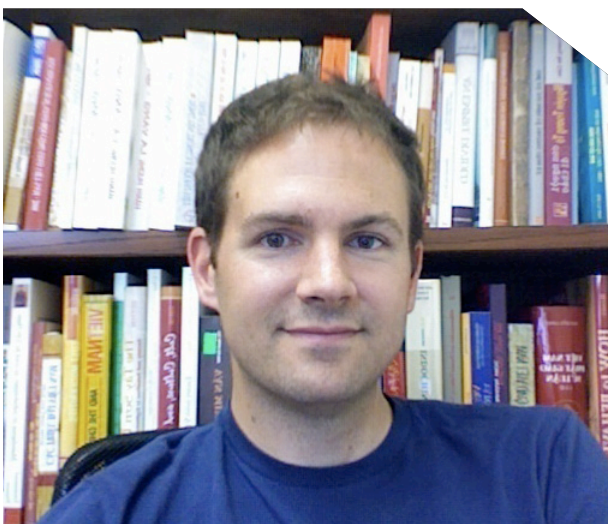
"The MSUG generated a sizable amount and range of data with great relevance not only for the study of the social and economic history of Vietnam, but also for broader subjects such as American development programs in the Cold War era," said Charles.

A project with a future

Professor Keith and his colleagues recognized the value in the records produced by MSUG and have begun the painstakingly long process of translating the materials into an online archive. "The range and relevance of the MSUG materials [will] translate into a unique, multi-disciplinary collection joining more traditional virtual archival formats to a range of innovative research possibilities. Especially promising is the wide range of statistical data about economic life and agricultural production in rural areas," says Charles.

Professor Keith's project seeks to make this information available to the scholarly community. "A virtual archive of MSUG would have lasting value not only for the field of Vietnamese Studies, but also for MSU. A virtual, interactive archive would draw the attention of the growing global community of scholars in Vietnam Studies, as well as members of a number of other fields of study."

Note: Professor Keith's project is currently seeking funding and his hope is to move forward with the project very soon. Interested in taking a class taught by Professor Keith? Sign up for one of his classes with the History Department and check out the full course offering at: <http://history.msu.edu/>



Professor Charles Keith



Alumni Spotlight



Brittany Fox (far right) with staff and employees of Thai Song.

It All Began with a Language Course

A student with a dream

Brittany Fox (BA '09), co-founder and director of Thai Song—a nonprofit working to better the lives of disadvantaged women in Thailand—began her journey there long before she ever set foot on its shores. As a student in Michigan State University's James Madison College, Brittany found the start of her journey through the study of Thai. This first step would be the beginning of a career devoted to both Thailand and its people.

Thai is one of thirteen "Less Commonly Taught Languages" (LCTL's) offered at Michigan State University, with direct support from The Asian Studies Center. 'LCTL's' are world languages that are less frequently studied by Americans, many of which are on the U.S. Department of Education's critical languages list. The MSU LCTL program coordinates those less commonly taught languages that have variable enrollments, but are considered of critical need.

Building a better world with the help of a LCTL

Within a few months of her arrival in Thailand in 2009, Brittany and co-founder Panida Ponkapin, started Thai Song. Thai Song is a fair trade business that is dedicated to empowering Thai women. By providing them with dignified employment, the organization aims to help women overcome poverty, improve their community and better their environment.

Brittany and her co-workers have trained the women they work with to crochet handbags and other items out of recycled plastic from the community, selling their products to businesses in the United States and online.

Throughout her work and time in Thailand, it has been Brittany's knowledge of the native language that has led to many successes. While working with the Thai people she has been able to converse with them freely, gaining their trust and respect. "They had never met an American who had learned the language outside of Thailand and were very impressed with my speaking ability," Brittany explains. "The 'Less Commonly Taught Language' program provided an all-around package tailored to helping prepare a focused student like myself for the practical use of the language."

For Brittany, the study of Thai not only opened the door to a future career in the country, but also allowed her to expand her social network while at MSU, getting involved with the Thai Language Club and Thai natives across campus.

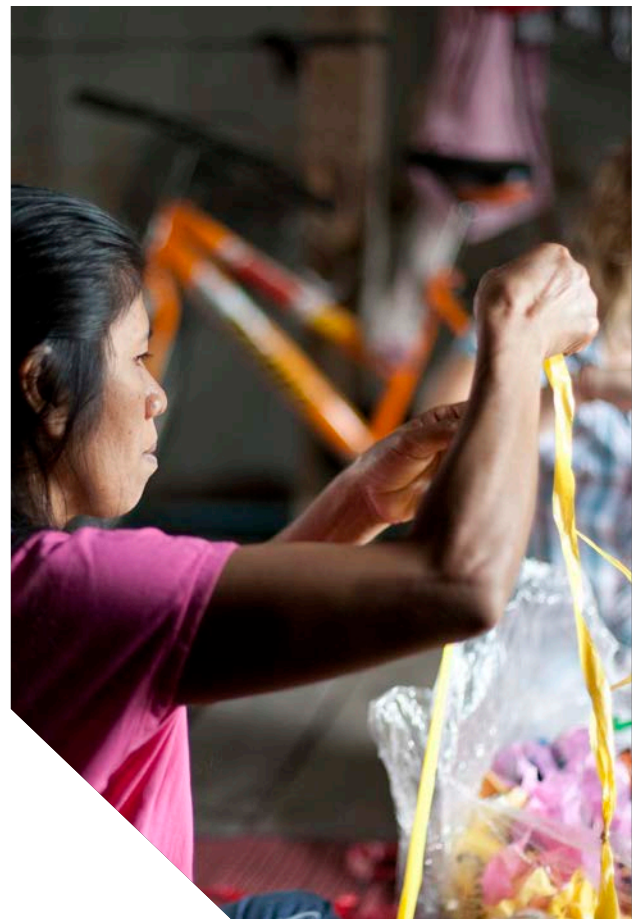
"Being granted the opportunity to study both Asian Studies and the Thai language at MSU was a huge benefit that has left a lasting impression on my journey to help disadvantaged women in Thailand," said Brittany. "I knew that there was no other language, apart from Thai, that would equip me to pursue my dreams."

* Brittany returned to campus October 20, 2011 to receive the MSU Alumni Association Distinguished Young Alumni award. For more information on Thai Song please visit: <http://thaisongfairtrade.org/>

To learn more about how you can support the Less Commonly Taught Languages program at MSU please visit: <http://asia.isp.edu/supportus>



A model shows off the work of Thai Song (earrings)



A Thai Song employee begins a new project

Community Spotlight



The Harmony of Discovery

MSU musicians find inspiration in Central Asia

In the Fall of 2009, a group of MSU musicians inspired by Kazakh culture, language and poetry collaborated with international engineering student and self-trained vocalist, Aina Abdikalikova to launch a cross-cultural music project. The group adopted the name “Moyindau,” which means “to acknowledge” in Kazakh. Since 2009, the project has grown and done much more than just celebrate Central Asian music and culture.

This past summer, in the spirit of cross-cultural collaboration and a keen sense for adventure, Moyindau members joined some unlikely friends to tour across Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey. Alex Kreger, who had spent the summer of 2009 studying Turkish cultural identity at the Boaziçi University in Istanbul, was eager to continue researching Central Asian music.

Alex and Aina began work on a grant proposal to the U.S. State Department; they eventually received a \$2,500 grant from the U.S. Embassy in Tajikistan along with \$4,900 from MSU. They were also able to raise more than \$6,000 through the online fundraising platform, Kickstart.

A chance encounter

An influential musical catalyst for the tour, however, was almost a complete coincidence. Alex was invited to perform at the Central Eurasian Studies Society Conference, which was co-sponsored by the Asian Studies Center and the Center for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies last October.

As part of the conference, Moyindau held a concert to showcase the Central Asian inspiration in their music. Among those in attendance were two Tajik scholars who appreciated Moyindau's take on their traditional folk songs.

"Even though [the music] was completely filtered through our own experience, our own voices, they recognized the songs," recalls Alex. This chance run-in opened channels of communication and inspired the group to expand their original Kazakh tour to branch out across other Central Asian countries.

Embracing Central Asia

An invitation to play at the Museum of Musical Culture in Dushanbe, Tajikistan once again altered the group's plans and they decided to split the tour into two legs. Alex Kreger, Norwegian saxophonist, Mette Rølvåg and Jazz Studies Graduate Student, Ryan Ptasnik made up the initial trio. Alex and Ryan were later joined by fellow MSU students, Susanna Mendlow and Kevin Bene for performances in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. After much preparation, the tour kicked off in Istanbul on June 1.

Moyindau's travels didn't always go smoothly – the group had acquired visas for Uzbekistan, but was unable to book any shows. They experienced difficulties with the language barrier as well as food and sanitary conditions, especially in remote regions. They were fortunate to meet many helping hands along the way. In addition to the support from the US Embassy in Tajikistan, they were welcomed by local MSU alumni who generously arranged rehearsal spaces and provided the group with instruments.

Moyindau also collaborated with the Bactria Cultural Center that promotes experimental arts in Dushanbe. Kirill, the music director, and his wife took the musicians in for a week. "It really felt like we had family there," says Alex.

To read the full article, visit our website: asia.isp.msu.edu

For more information on Moyindau, visit their blog: moyindau.blogspot.com.



The members of Moyindau: (from left to right) Kevin Bene (sax), Alex Kreger (piano), Ryan Ptasnik (drums), Susanna Mendlow (cello)

Asian Studies Staff



Top (from left to right): Cathy Fields, Vu Nguyen, Ellen Acker, Heng Jiang
Bottom (from left to right): Leslie Jablonski, Izabela Babinska, Jun Wan

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