



Photo courtesy Kendall Konning

PADNOS
INTERNATIONAL
CENTER

GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

Sustainable Study Abroad

A Tragedy in the Name of Social Justice: A Case From Nepal
Solidarity, Students and the Struggle to Live as Global Citizens

Social Justice in China

A Laowai in Beijing

Photo courtesy Tulsi Bhandari



Sustainable Study Abroad

Mark Schaub, Executive Director

My family is running out of space in our yard for any more trees. We plant them because we love them, but also because it's a positive for the environment. One of my thoughts in October, while planting another 10 trees on our yard was, "Great. I just offset all the carbon I burned on that business trip last week to the Netherlands." My self-satisfaction, though, was short-lived: when I went online to carbonneutral.com I was horrified to discover that I (or more accurately, GVSU—my employer) would have had to plant over 72 trees to offset the 1.5 metric tons of carbon that trip added to the atmosphere. And there many companies and organizations—both reputable and disreputable—that would be happy to take between \$30 and \$230 to "offset" that GVSU business trip.

It should be no surprise that I sometimes wonder if the phrase "sustainable study abroad" is a kind of oxymoron. After all, few activities are as unsustainable, in a big-picture sense, as getting on a jet aircraft to fly halfway around the world to enroll in university-level courses. This is especially so when by comparison you can get on the Rapid's bus #50 and get to class right here in West Michigan. Still, many GVSU faculty and staff continue to work with Padnos International Center to encourage ever more students to get on planes to study abroad, as well as climb aboard airliners around the world to come here—to GVSU—to study as international students. Despite the need for all of us to think more carefully about the environmental impact of our local and international travel, we *are* doing the right thing.

As everyone concerned about climate change knows, we all must collectively change the world...or else. Fortunately, the best study abroad experiences are about changing the world for the better.

Our children and grandchildren will be better off if we re-consider the American Dream. Right now, our "American" way of life is the least sustainable way of life; it is less sustainable, in that Americans individually use more resources and emit more carbon than individuals in any other nation. Sustainability is a social justice issue. GVSU's Director of Sustainability, Norman Christopher, reminds us that sustainability is not just about the environment, it's about economic sustainability, and social health: the "triple bottom line." Sustainable study abroad, and a lifetime of sustainable living upon return from that study abroad, is a way we can help students to individually and collectively become global citizens who think globally and act locally.

Being abroad for a full, and responsibly lived, semester will offset that plane trip—and it will offset it over a lifetime. How can semesters abroad do that? Let me count the ways:

1. See how the rest of the world lives. For decades, Germans and other western Europeans have been carrying their own reusable shopping bags to the grocer, whereas it's a radical new concept here in the USA. Recycling, public transport, walking, fewer showers, and building things to last are other non-American traditions that semester abroad students really miss when they get back to the land of fast food, waste, exurban sprawl, and strip malls with a 20-year lifespan. We have much to learn from other societies—from the ragpickers of Delhi to the *rububikia* of Cairo, and we would have a more sustainable lifestyle if we adopted those lessons. We have many successes at GVSU to share with others (e.g., our tremendous growth in bus ridership); we just need to know that much of what we're doing is catching on to what the rest of the world is doing.
2. Engage in the local community. Visiting a country for a week or two doesn't allow students to develop the earth friendly habits of their host society, but spending 16 weeks there does. Many GVSU students do volunteer and service-work that enhance the conditions for local schools and neighbors; visiting as a short-term tourist typically doesn't provide opportunity to be a real help. The international students who planted 100 White Pine seedlings along M-45 during GVSU Sustainability Week wouldn't have had that opportunity on a very short visit. It's only by being here a whole semester and caring about GVSU and the world that they became connected to the opportunity. We hope they return to see the fruits of their labor as alumni!
3. Develop lifelong habits and awareness. My colleagues and I in International Education believe that if everyone studied abroad there wouldn't be any wars. We really do think that. A semester abroad infuses one's imagination, one's consciousness, with the real knowledge that we (everyone on earth) really are all in this together. That knowledge really does change the world.





Maoists warm up in Nepal's countryside. Photo courtesy Tulsi Bhandari.

A Tragedy in the Name of Social Justice: A Case From Nepal

Tulsi Bhandari

He is twelve years old, emotionally flat, a poor village kid living with vivid flashbacks of torture and the brutal killings of his father and brother that he witnessed more than two years ago; spots on the street in front of his house exactly where they were dragged out, ruthlessly beaten up and finally shot in the head. Having witnessed the deadly butchering of his family at such a young age has left this innocent youth emotionless; to share and refresh this trauma quietly every day and night with the tears and requiem of his mother and sister. The eyes of his eighteen year old sister turn red like fire, as if all her tears have drained away. There is nothing left to grieve with. In a shivering hollow voice, she says, "I feel like killing them, those who killed my innocent father and brother, and left my mother to cry forever."

About two years ago, this small village along the Indian border was attacked by the Maoists because the state sponsored vigilantes, Indian criminals hiding in Nepal, were forcing poor villagers to carry guns and patrol against them. In the attack, all the houses were set on fire and about fourteen villagers, innocent poor, including a fifteen year old kid trapped in this inescapable and deadly conflict were slaughtered en masse.

By the signing of a peace agreement a year ago, a decade long Maoist insurgency - "The People's War," fought in the name of social justice, was "officially" ended in Nepal. The 235 year old monarchy was suspended and stripped of all power. The interim parliament currently includes the Maoists and is struggling with severe political deadlock in an attempt to fulfill its mandate to hold a Constituent Assembly election which, as of this writing, has already been postponed twice and is still in limbo.

With deliberate and focused attention most of the scarce resources including professional expertise and international aid in the name of peace building have been invested towards easing this deadlock. Maoists have pulled out of the interim cabinet to intensify pressure for their demands for a fully proportional electoral system and the proclamation of Nepal as a republic as preconditions for the election. They have also been demanding that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) be integrated with the Nepalese Army to form one national army, and the management of the containment sites, where as per the peace agreement, their cadres (PLA) are currently resting under the monitoring of the United Nations. Depressingly, no meaningful attention to the victims has been given in the ongoing peace process, despite its being heavily equipped with sophisticated international expertise.

Victims still suffer in a great state of fear and trauma, and grow increasingly vulnerable. Continuation of the culture of violence is clearly marked by further victimization, and violent agitations and human rights abuses are carried on by more than a dozen newly formed armed groups. Families of those “made to disappear” during the war still long to know if their loved ones are alive or dead. Because of this ongoing culture of violence, thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs), those who were forced to flee, still have not been able to return back to their homes and reunite with their families.

New atrocities and violent agitations are creating and justifying the need for more professionals, which serves to expand the scope of these professions; the documenters, the “counting” jobs; the accounting of new victims for statistical comparisons with other hotspot situations in an attempt to assess their markets. The streets of the capital, Kathmandu, in spite of increasing pollution, now look colorful with the growing numbers of expensive vehicles belonging to international organizations and their colorful foreign peace buildings, filled with human rights experts.

Concerned primarily with their own personal safety, their main role and major motives can be viewed as little more than legitimizing their prescribed strategies and maximizing return of their academic and professional investment. With their professionally justified mandates these experts in most cases come with some sort of “international” prescription- from their list of monetized remedies.

Legitimized by their sophisticated professional educations and affiliations, these foreign “experts” along with their host country counterparts often treat the victims of conflict as little more than desperate consumers, desperate and starving for their professional help and pity.

Such an attitude, regardless of the resources invested can produce no meaningful outcome as it not only largely undermines the enormous potential and strength of the people, which in fact is the only true foundation for real peace, but is contemptuous of their worth and dignity. Moreover, this could also result in repeating the same mistakes of the past, that of not being able to see that these victims in fact belong to the same class of the oppressed and ignored who actually formed the major powerbase and who made it possible to sideline the 235 year old monarchy. It is important not to forget the expensive lessons from the past about the cost of ignoring and leaving people oppressed and vulnerable for so long.

Ironically, current investments in the peace process and all the sophisticated expertise utilized rarely make any sense or any real difference to the victims except in exceptional cases, where for example they might be approached, and asked to recall their traumatic past in order to fulfill the duties of documentation. Without any ethical consideration, their trauma and emotions are refreshed and brought back again and once the documentation job is done these experts just leave, causing the victims to feel even more traumatized. In contrast, a “minimally educated” local human rights worker with comparatively no resources or professional education is found to be more influential in reaching out to victims and surprisingly more ethical compared to the foreign experts.

Open rally in Kathmandu. Photo courtesy Tulsi Bhandari



Since he could actually relate to and feel as the victims do, he at least is aware of and admits his dilemma by saying, "It really breaks my heart and makes me feel like crying to come to these people, ask about their traumatic past and not be able to do anything and just have to leave them crying."

To be blunt, "social justice" in today's competing herds of professionals can be seen as highly profitable propaganda for maximizing the return on their professional and political investment. Regardless of advanced expertise and resources, efforts without passion, feelings and commitment will never have any meaningful impact.

"It was just like killing a goat....I was very proud," recalled one of the ex-cadres when asked how he felt while killing his enemy. Similarly, one of the responsible senior Maoist Commanders confidently says that he and his party's actions were by no means human rights abuses. He attempts an easy escape from his and his party's noble contribution in producing 15, 000 deaths and about 100,000 internally displaced in their twelve years of "The People's War." Mass killings and the slaughtering of parents in front of their children are commonly justified in the name of a revolution for social justice.

The need for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), provisioned in the peace agreement doesn't seem to have received any priority or seriousness in the ongoing peace process. The first draft of the TRC came after pressure from human rights groups but makes no sense as it provisions providing amnesty to the perpetrators of past war crimes. The key players are busy in their power sharing negotiations and arguing about the issues of constituent assembly election, restructuring the state and the electoral system as major agendas but nothing has been done to bring about a true sense of peace. The peace process is currently a long way from healing any wounds, addressing past wrongs, or serving the people in any meaningful way. Nothing has been done in regards to building solidarity among the divided communities or to address and transform the culture of violence. The grief of victims is not even acknowledged, much less honored. Peace efforts seem far removed from reality in that the peace process should actually make sense and give meaning and comfort primarily to these "subject" people, not what "experts" have found to be meaningful. People themselves must be empowered to take ownership of the peace process, not treated as "eunuchs" by means of imported prescriptions. Otherwise, all that will have been created is the commoditization of suffering, a doing business and a creating of markets for professionals at the cost of the innocent victim's lives, their sufferings and oppression.

Sadly, such realizations are largely ignored, evidenced by the continuation of a culture of violence and its justification, as a leader of one of the newly formed armed groups in Terai says, "We are not the cowards, as the Maoist's chairman called us. We are also fighters and revolutionaries." When asked about human rights issues, he replied "Revolution and justice are not possible without spilling blood. The earth says; give me blood, and I will give you freedom."

"Regardless of advanced expertise and resources, efforts without passion, feelings and commitment will never have any meaningful impact."



Tulsi Bhandari is a native of Nepal and is an international graduate student at Grand Valley's Social Work and Public Administration programs. He has been working on Nepal's issues and directing a documentary - "Beneath Everest: Nepal Reborn," which focuses on Nepal's Maoist insurgency, struggle for democracy, victimization and human rights issues. He can be reached at: tulsibhandari@yahoo.com

PIC Introduces Elena Selezneva Coordinator of Faculty-led Programs

Recently, I have joined the dynamic and exciting team of the Padnos International Center as the Coordinator of Faculty-led Study Abroad Programs. Promoting international education has always been one of my passions, and I am very fortunate to have the opportunity to continue working in this field at GVSU. For the last five years, I have been coordinator of the study abroad programs at the College of Engineering at Michigan State University (MSU). In addition to these responsibilities, I also completed graduate studies in two different Masters programs: Linguistics in 2005 and Education in 2007 (with a specialization in Educational Technology). My areas of research are foreign/second language acquisition, technology in foreign/second language learning and teaching, and international education: students' cultural experience through study abroad

Before coming to the USA, I was working and studying at Volgograd State Pedagogical University (Volgograd, Russia), where I completed my undergraduate studies in Education (with a specialization in TESOL) in 1997. I was born and grew up in the region of Volgograd in Russia. I believe that my Russian heritage combined with the practices and skills that I have learned and implemented in the USA will contribute to developing practices of international education and to better serve the needs of students, faculty and the community that has adopted me. I like Western Michigan and I want students to take this vision from GVSU to wherever they travel.

I am thrilled to participate in the field of study-abroad programs at GVSU. There is a lot of potential for growth in the area of international education and I believe that GVSU is in a strong position to benefit from this interest. As a result, this University's vision and leadership will enrich the community of Western Michigan.

When I first came to GVSU campus in the fall it was a warm and sunny day and I still have the same impression in my mind: a warm and sunny university and this feeling does not depend on the weather. I am happy to be here.

"There is a lot of potential for growth in the area of international education and I believe that GVSU is in a strong position to benefit from this interest. As a result, this University's vision and leadership will enrich the community of Western Michigan."



Solidarity

Students and the Struggle to Live as Global Citizens: A Retrospective on LIB 491

Melissa Baker-Boosamra

"The idea of liberal education is more important than ever in our interdependent world. An education based on the idea of an inclusive global citizenship, and on the possibilities of a compassionate imagination has the potential to transcend divisions created by distance, cultural difference, and mistrust. Developing this ideal further and thinking about how to modify it in light of our times is one of the most exciting and urgent tasks we can undertake as educators and citizens."

-Martha Nussbaum, "Liberal Education & Global Community" (2004)



During the spring and summer of 2007, twelve exceptional students and two enthusiastic Grand Valley faculty members set off on a three month inquiry seeking to define the idea of "global citizenship." Not only did students and faculty inquire theoretically into the definition of this illusive ideal, but perhaps more importantly, this group sought to explore how best to live it. With the intention of developing a sense of relationship with and responsibility to citizens in other parts of the world, Liberal Studies faculty Melissa Baker-Boosamra and Dawn Heartwell hoped to

do as Martha Nussbaum suggested, and take students on a journey that would "transcend divisions created by distance, cultural difference and mistrust."

This twelve week course included three distinct phases: Five weeks of study, research and trip preparation, two weeks of delegation travel in Guatemala, and five final weeks spent developing a "solidarity project" at home. During the first five weeks, students examined the impact of US economic, political and military systems on the people and systems of the developing world – specifically considering our neighbor to the south, Guatemala, as a case study. Students specifically considered the ideas of globalization, the history of Guatemala, sustainability, and solidarity. These ideas were all just words at the beginning of the summer. However, after a rich and challenging twelve weeks together, the words came to life and began to change the lives of students and faculty alike.

On the first night of class, students were invited to attend a "dinner party." When they arrived, many were surprised to find out that the "dinner party" would serve as an introduction to the disparity and economic injustice that exists between rich and poor in the world that would come to be one of the focal points of the group throughout the summer. In Guatemala specifically, poverty is widespread and deeply entrenched. According to The World Bank, more than 60% of the country's households are estimated to be living below the poverty line. The country's high rates of illiteracy, infant mortality and infant malnourishment are even higher among rural indigenous peoples. This while, according to the US Census Bureau, the official poverty rate in the US in 2006 was estimated at 12.3% of the total

population. As students walked in the door on this first night of class, each was given a role to play, with some students being served delicious pasta and salad with sparkling juice, on china and fine linen. Other students were required to sit on the floor in a corner, while they only had a small portion of rice to eat, and a limited amount of water to share. Through LIB 491: Global Citizenship, students were invited to consider, firsthand issues of social and economic stratification, and our role as US citizens in this inequity.

After five weeks developing an initial framework for the idea of “global citizenship,” students and faculty departed for Guatemala in order to more fully investigate the relationship of the US to this developing country, and to see firsthand the effects of our nation’s historical foreign policy there. According to William Blum, acclaimed author of Killing Hope, the US military and CIA in Guatemala organized a coup which overthrew the democratically-elected and progressive government of Jacobo Arbenz in 1954. This US supported coup initiated 40 years of death-squads, torture, disappearances, mass executions, and unimaginable cruelty, totaling well over 100,000 victims, amounting to indisputably one of the most inhuman chapters of the 20th century. Arbenz had nationalized the U.S. firm, United Fruit Company, which had extremely close ties to the American power elite. As justification for the coup, Washington declared that Guatemala had been on the verge of a Soviet takeover, when in fact the Russians had so little interest in the country that it didn’t even maintain diplomatic relations. The real problem in the eyes of Washington, in addition to United Fruit, was the danger of Guatemala’s social democracy spreading to other countries in Latin America.

This history lesson was one that the group would learn over and over again, throughout our time in Guatemala... a lesson that repeated itself through the stories and testimonies of the Guatemalan people we met with each day. Students witnessed firsthand, the painful importance of keeping history alive in Guatemala. After over half a century of military governments, widespread repression and torture, the group found that many Guatemalans still struggle to deal with the horrific memory and aftermath of this legacy. Yet, through many conversations and observations, students found that Guatemalans often hold tightly to this collective memory, as it is their only link to truth, justice, and hope.

The group spent 16 days in Guatemala, traveling through the country and meeting daily with various groups that represented the spectrum of Guatemala and the issues its citizens face today. Host organizations included human rights groups, an association working with families of the “disappeared,” forensic anthropologists working on the excavation of mass graves and massacre sites, a project promoting literacy and education for the indigenous poor, a labor union and others. These host organizations spoke to the group about current political and economic conditions in Guatemala, left in the wake of historical US intervention. Many students were deeply disturbed to hear of the direct negative impact that the US has had in recent Guatemalan history through military, political and economic policy in the region. Students were equally troubled by the lack of awareness in the US about how our country directly affects governments and people in other parts of the world, while many Guatemalans were more educated about US policy than our own citizenry.

Students also engaged in service work projects during their stay. While in San Lucas Toliman, students worked in service placements ranging from a reforestation project and the construction of a women's center to trench-digging in order to improve a village's access to potable water. These experiences offered students the opportunity to work with other international volunteers and locals, and to look critically at the idea of service, and their role in it.

Throughout their time in Guatemala, students and faculty alike wrestled with the role of the US in this country. While learning about the destructive historical influence of the US government in Guatemala, students witnessed the contemporary intervention of well-intentioned foreigners many times throughout the delegation. The group was faced with a number of critical questions: How does our mere presence as US citizens in this developing country help or hinder Guatemalans? What is the difference between service and solidarity? Are we, even with our good intentions, perpetuating dependency, hierarchy or a sense of entitlement? Who is to say what Guatemala and Guatemalans "need?" What happens when foreigners come in and do for those in need, rather than doing with?

These questions arose organically during the group's time in Guatemala. They were faced with these issues, and confronted them through critical self-reflection and group analysis. What's more, students faced these issues by engaging these questions in dialogue with our Guatemalan hosts. Students asked the many people and groups who we met with about their reflections on our role as US citizens in their country and in their lives. The students listened. Students listened to the many stories, ideas and opinions that they encountered. As students had their perspectives on the role of the US in the world changed, they began to see the faces of those who looked different from themselves begin to look a little bit more like their own. They began to hear the voices of the voiceless. It was now time to do something. The Grand Valley students listened, and in response to what they heard, the group responded with conscious collective action.

Photos of Guatemala courtesy Chloe Skidmore.



During the last five weeks of LIB 491, students had the task of developing a solidarity project, here at home, that would address the conditions in Guatemala and embody the spirit of "global citizenship." Students came home transformed by what they had learned, and energized to live up to the responsibility that had been entrusted to them by our many Guatemalan friends and hosts. Once they became aware of the history and contemporary problems facing Guatemala, it became the responsibility of the group to inform others. As a result, in early August, the group held a highly successful awareness raising event and benefit concert, "Memory, Truth and Justice" at the Wealthy Theatre in downtown Grand Rapids. "Memory Truth and Justice" featured student documentaries, artwork and photography, along with an overview Guatemalan history, student reflections and a number of booths that represented many of the Guatemalan organizations we met with, and local groups seeking to improve relations between the US and the developing world. This event attracted over 250 people and raised more than \$1,000 that was donated to several Guatemalan organizations of the students' choosing.

Throughout these remarkable twelve weeks, students and faculty began to understand the meaning of global citizenship. Through learning about our nation's history in other parts of the world, students developed a sense of awareness. Through engaging in dialogue with other human beings, who may initially seem so different and whose voices are often not heard, the group began to cultivate a sense of connection and compassion. By acknowledging our power and influence as US citizens, the group began to develop a sense of civic and global responsibility. And through working collectively toward a common goal, the group promoted a spirit of solidarity with each other and the people of Guatemala. Through this transformative experience, LIB 491 students and faculty began what will likely be a lifelong journey toward the goal of living as true global citizens.



Events

Wednesday, February 20

1:00 - 5:00

Passport Fair

Padnos International Center

130 Lake Ontario Hall

Chiaroscuro Film Festival

February 17

Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles/

Qian li zou dan qi (2005, China)

Yimou Zhang

March 16

Machuca (2004, Chile)

Andrés Wood

March 30

The Wooden Camera (2003, France/U.K./S. Africa)

Ntshaveni Wa Luruli

The mission of CHIAROSCURO is to promote international cinema in the development of cultural awareness and a greater understanding of the diverse members of our community. Great cinema is an integral part of culture and therefore can have a tremendous impact on our perceptions.

This season's theme is Children of the Screen, a series of films from around the world that deal with a variety of issues that children face in different cultures.

UICA

21 Sheldon Blvd SE

Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Social Justice in China

Greg Mahoney

The sky turns rusty red if not a brownish gray over the course of a long summer day in Beijing. Some blame the Gobi Desert. Some blame the factories. Others blame the cars. Like you, more than 17 million live and work in the metro area, with almost 9 million inside the city limits alone. In the morning, perhaps stuck in traffic or standing in line, perhaps crammed in a subway car or elevator cab, you may feel, for better or worse, personally connected with all Beijingers. It's the same air, after all. The same time. Same place. Same crush. Different tea. Nonetheless, you settle down and get to work. There is much to do. Around you, people sweep, build, teach, cook, calculate, and care for others; more or less, you do the same.

In my work—that is to say, the general theoretical rubric that guides my work—social justice is frequently if not always a question of power. Which socioeconomic class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, or ideological group wields power? Are those with power promoting or impeding a progressive movement towards equity? At the broadest level, these are the sorts of questions that motivate most people interested in social justice. What I examine more specifically, however, is “relational representation.” In other words, I am interested in how the haves and have-nots understand, represent, and relate to themselves with/through/against their others.

At dusk, the air cools and the sky darkens enough to mask its pollution. Then, for a couple of hours at least, you and a few million others take to the streets. Amid the neon, propane, beer, and food stands, amongst the liquid throng of students, workers, migrants, and frustrated cabbies...near the transgenders, the carefully queer, and the retirees herding children...beyond the balancing acts of beer drinking buddies...past the women arm in arm, certain of their sisterhood... you follow lovers and the broken hearted, adrift and oblivious to everyone except those they're loving or those they've lost. And in the midst of the melee of emotions, dreams, desires, you catch your reflection passing a plate glass window. A pause but, you're unsurprised to see what you've long suspected. You've become Chinese. Not even your mother would recognize you...?

In the spirit of progressive social justice, my chief aim is the promotion of equality and mutual understanding. Consequently, my fundamental interest is the deconstruction of various forms of hegemonic, ideological discourses. Likewise, I am interested in overcoming what the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer calls “ontological prejudices”—especially my own—for personal and community growth. Indeed, whether coquetting with modes of expression familiar to Gadamer, Hegel, or Derrida, my goal is to foment critical consciousness. Fortunately, such aims are by no means unique at Grand Valley. Better yet, they are portable.

So you're Chinese. What does this mean? Is your first language Mandarin, Cantonese, Mongolian, or Arabic? Do you speak English like 300 million of your compatriots? Perhaps you grew up in the Hainan highlands, your mother a Miao, your father a Lisu, but distinguished yourself at an early age with an excellent essay on Marx and Engels. Did you finish middle school, high school or earn a college degree? Are your parents peasants? Does your sister work in the city? Do you own a car or live in a nice apartment? Cable TV? Is there someone waiting for you at home? Did you have a nice day at work? From one of the ubiquitous record stores, seemingly spaced just far enough apart to provide every street corner with its own soundtrack, you hear John Mayer crooning, "It's not a silly little moment / It's not the storm before the calm / This is the deep and dyin' breath of / This love we've been workin' on..." It's a silly song but still a lot to chew on; you stop at a favorite food stand next door and order dinner.

Since 1998, much of my research has been in or about China. Because China continues to experience dramatic cultural and economic shifts, and because the Chinese play an increasingly powerful role in global affairs, my research interests have found much to ponder in the People's Republic. For example, my dissertation research (2003) examined how the Chinese Communist Party's contemporary ideological expressions (nominally, former-President Jiang Zemin's "three represents" theory) were being understood by farmers, migrant workers, the emergent middle class, business leaders, political officials, and ethnic minorities. More recently, my work has been a close reading of current-President Hu Jintao's "scientific development concept," as well as his "harmony" campaign. In a book chapter written in Beijing this past summer and forthcoming in an edited volume next year, I demonstrate how Hu's concept of harmony, rhetorically at least, synthesizes Confucian and Marxist concepts of social justice. Of course, it remains to be seen whether Hu's political theory will match his political praxis.

A few feet away, and again and again down the street like old Christmas lights, massage parlors blink, they wink, they open for business, their miniskirted women hovering near but never outside otherwise shadowy doorways. You see migrant workers sneaking their kids through gaps in the sheet metal fences to hidden, inner-city campgrounds that spring up every night on building sites where they labor for subsistence wages. A police car cruises through the neighborhood and everyone seems to float for a moment. You recall what you've never forgotten: China is a repressive police state. Meanwhile, across the street, a man cultivating dreadlocks spreads a small sheet of Rastafarian wares on the sidewalk. He places a small boombox in the middle of the sheet. Under and around John Mayer and through the neon—faint but unmistakable—you hear Bob Marley insisting: "Get up, stand up: stand up for your rights!" Given all the foot traffic, most people are already on their feet... "Get up, stand up: stand up...!"

Faculty/Staff Exchange Grant Recipients

Mary Albrecht, Cracow University of Economics
Karen Libman, East China Normal University

CIEE Faculty Development Seminar Grant Recipients

Diane Maoduch-Pitzer, Liberal Studies Department
Rob Sterward-Ingersoll, Political Science Department

Intercultural Studies Faculty Development Grant Recipients

Stephen Borders, Public and Nonprofit Administration
James Houston, Criminal Justice
Gwyn Madden, Anthropology
Deanna Morse, School of Communications
Peimin Ni, Philosophy
Min Qi, Chemistry
John Weber, Geology

Padnos International Center Grant Information can be found by visiting: www.gvsu.edu/pic

Without question, China is a very diverse place and many there choose to emphasize divergent if not contradictory conceptualizations of social justice. The word harmony in Chinese, *he* 和, is itself a good example. Some tend to emphasize what they interpret as a literal etymological reading of the character: 禾 (which means “grain” or “crops”) plus 口 (which means “mouth”). Thusly, they argue that “harmony” results when people have enough to eat, a point, not coincidentally, used frequently by some as justification for inequitable, authoritarian rule. Others, however, note that 和 also means “and,” perhaps the most commonly used conjunction in Chinese, if not every language. Such thinkers tend to emphasize that social harmony entails more than mere survival; rather, it requires abandoning the logic of either/or for the Confucian and/or Marxist dialectical form, the inclusive and equitably minded “and.”

As the evening winds down, some students from the university next door join you around one of the little folding tables that pop up around the food stands at a certain hour. The ensuing discussion is heavier than the beer and barbecue! With food and drink between you, however, candor quickly becomes the rule. Will arguably resurgent pro-labor Maoist values play an increasingly important role in transforming China and the global economy, perhaps even compelling greater social equality worldwide? And because they make “everything,” shouldn’t both Chinese and American consumers recognize Chinese workers collectively as “our workers.” Or, what should we make of the desperate attempt to make Beijing look perfect ahead of the 2008 Olympics, all the while exacerbating environmental pollution and remaking the city in a way that makes it harder on the poor? What does this conversation mean to those women standing over there in the doorways? Without being in complete agreement with your fellow Beijingers, all seem to express the same desire for harmony, for social justice. Because you’re a traveler, however, you understand that promoting harmony and social justice at home and abroad are very often one and the same.

Photos courtesy Greg Mahoney



Village boys



Village girls

An Assistant Professor of Liberal Studies and East Asian Studies, Greg Mahoney spent summer 2007 as a visiting scholar with the School of Ethnology and Sociology at the Central University of Nationalities in Beijing. At CUN he taught a graduate seminar entitled “Critical Theory and Ethnography,” and directed GVSU LIB major Vanessa Crowley’s S³ research project, “Queer Beijing: An Ethnography” (see opposite page). During the 2008 winter term at Grand Valley he is offering a course on Maoism (EAS 380). He can be reached at mahoneyg@gvsu.edu.



Hutongs have a way of humbling and diminishing you as you wander deeper into those labyrinthine alleyways of old Beijing. This never happens all at once, it's always in increments so small you barely notice the loss. A sense of being out of place, too far off the main road echoes in every step. Maybe it's the dark; there are no streetlights here. For that matter there aren't any directions either. The surrounding shadows have an ethereal quality, there are certainly buildings and perhaps even people beneath them, but they are not on the same plane, you are a ghost, a *laowai*. This is not your place.

Ahead, this vein of pavement comes to an abrupt end, only to be cut by another artery going deeper still into maze. A decrepit building stands opposite the mouth of the ally. Is this the destination? Surely not, there is just a neon sign proclaiming BAR —only the A glows red. Going in seems as good an option as continuing to wander the streets. You open the door. Like outside, everything is abandoned, covered in neglect.

Music slinks down the stairs and seductively beckons that you follow it to its source. A winking red star on the wall barely registers. "Memory Island" it whispers to you as you cross the threshold into another world. The stairs give a tenuous squish that suggests there is little support beneath the carpet. It doesn't matter though, the music holds you. Suddenly you are back on solid ground, in a small dark room, filled with twenty men and their cigarettes. All are local. They are initially surprised to see that an "other" has wandered into their theater but soon cease to notice. The show is about to begin; now you are one of them. Now you belong.

The lights go out. No one seems to breathe. A downbeat with a hint of techno thrumming in the background emanates steadily from the speakers. When just enough tension has built, the multicolored spotlights over the small stage erupt from the ceiling. At the same time the song changes; a piano has entered the mix. It shouldn't work, but it does, oh so well. The new light reveals nine drag queens at the back of the stage. And they are queens, all of them exude an aura of pure femininity. The mind races to figure out how they can possibly all be men. The queens waste no time. Once all forty-two eyes are on them, the show really begins. A sultry voice proclaims "I saw you and her. Walking in the rain. You were holding hands. And I will never be the same." One-by-one they catwalk downstage. Each stops briefly, showing her best side. When the last one walks down the stage, all are eating out of her hands. She is beautiful in a way that the others aren't. You are so captured by her beauty that the server has to shake you back long enough so that he can take your drink order. You grab him before he leaves. You say the first words your mouth can form. No one notices the microphone in her hand, her strut stops. She begins to sing, her voice gentle, unforced, astounding. She sings of sorrow in a way that needs no language. Asking desperately, you have to know, "Ta jiao shemme?" Who is she? Her name is ...Flower.

"As far back as my memory goes, I have always known that I was different from the other boys. They would be playing and I wanted nothing to do with them. I just wanted to be with the girls. I knew what I was supposed to do, but it wasn't right. Eventually I couldn't take it any more, I had to do something. I came out to my parents when I turned seventeen. They were completely against me... at first. My mother cried. She'd lost her only son. She'd never have a grandchild. My father, on the other hand, didn't say much. He just asked that I leave for a bit while they sorted things out. You really don't know what to expect after that. I mean, you have to expect the worst. But over time they've come to accept me as their daughter. Most people are not so lucky. Their parents find out and want nothing to do with them again. Too much shame from their friends. They think it's somehow their fault. Not even that, it's just too confusing. I mean, it's bad enough if you're homosexual; but transsexual?" As she tells her story, her face morphs. She tries to hide the pain behind a mask of a smile, but it never reaches her eyes -- the sorrow shows through.



"I started performing four years ago. I don't enjoy it very much. Most people don't make it that long but I don't have much choice. What else can I do? No one would hire me if I looked like this. My ID reads "man;" but that's clearly a lie to anyone who sees me. At least here I get some acceptance for who I am, but that's only because they know that I am a man. To them I'm just a really devoted drag queen. I had a coworker tell me that he couldn't understand why I would possibly want to actually "be" a woman. They don't understand what it's like (she sighs and inhales deeply on her cigarette). I'm not like them. I AM a woman."

"People out there (as she gestures to the street) don't understand me either. They think that I am just a man who dresses as a woman, or worse, that I am a man who can't find a boyfriend so I trick them into thinking that I am a woman. The worst is when I have to use the bathroom when I'm out there. I really try to avoid it. If I can't, I have to use the Men's room. I hide my face so that no one will see how I look. The problem is, people notice if you act like you

don't belong. If they notice, I try to leave as quickly as possible. I shouldn't have to explain myself to people who only want to mock me." The owner says its time to quit talking, he wants to lock up and leave. The story will have to be finished another night.

Another night in the Hutongs, another show. Things are different this time around. Now there is life where before there was only shadow. People recognize you from last time. They smile when they see you. Not quite a local yet but certainly not a ghost either, at the very least they see you as Chinese now. After the show, Flower wants to talk again.

You sit at a wobbly white plastic table under an umbrella promoting beer. Across the street a woman is closing her shop while the last customer wanders over to a kabob vendor with his arms full of bottles of beer for himself and his compatriots, the same brand promoted on the umbrella in fact.

"I can't believe that the others won't come out here. I guess I understand their fear. There are places that I don't want to go, but here? Everyone already knows what we do in there. But the others, they don't want to be seen outside of Memory Island. They think that the few people out here will think that they are strange."

"My parents used to set me up before I came out. Usually they would choose daughters of their friends. They were hoping I would marry one of them. Now they are starting to ask if I will find a husband. I am not ready for that. I am not even sure if I ever will be. As for finding someone, I don't have the troubles the other performers have. My boyfriends don't have to see me un-become a woman. I mean, I don't look like I do when I perform, but I still look like a woman. A lot of the men I date are straight, which is good and bad. Good because I am not a gay man, but bad because eventually they cannot deal with my ...situation. None of them last long. I don't feel like I need (sexual reassignment) surgery to have a healthy relationship, all I need is for a man to see me for who I am. It is not an easy task to be sure."

This opinion changes later. While you are talking with another transgender performer about how they felt about surgery Flower overhears what you are saying and interjects. *"Anyone who gets the surgery might as well kill herself."* She instantly realizes that she has revealed something personal and quickly disappears to prepare for the show. Once alone, she explains herself.

"Before the surgery, when you are just a performer-or anyone else for that matter, people in the (LGBT) community will love you no matter what. But that just isn't the case afterwards. They will say that you aren't one of them anymore, that you don't belong. The outside world still doesn't accept us. We can't be a part of their community either. My past would always have to be a secret, especially if I wanted a family of my own. At least this way, I can have boyfriends who are attracted to people like me, even if only for a little while."

Flower's story is only one in a city of millions. The stories go on endlessly, like the Hutongs; a labyrinth of social construction. The gay community is segregated, in that there is no one place that everyone goes or even where everyone is explicitly welcomed. Instead the locations are subdivided by economic class and also by gender roles. There is a prevailing ideology in the affluent gay community that men are men, and should act like it - which means being macho and patriarchal. Those who don't follow this unwritten rule are pushed to the back room or in the extreme to a place like Memory Island. Flower's story does not tell the part about the lesbian who must wear high heels with a mini skirt and act hyper feminine just to fit in, instead of her preferred jeans and a t-shirt; who cannot be with her girlfriend; and who must fake a relationship with a man to please her parents. Nor is hers' the story of the man who must leave his three year old son with his wife in another province so the he may authentically be himself. Those are other stories.

As you step back out of the Hutong, you look back. Part of you wants to see what lies within, just one more time. But the dark has swallowed all traces. You know you are leaving a part of yourself in the labyrinth. It will remain there, always. This should make you sad, but it doesn't. A Chinese proverb comes to mind: *"You'll have to find yourself before you can find your way home."* You aren't lost any more. You've found a place, or maybe that place has found you. And I will never be the same.



Vanessa Crowley is currently an undergraduate student at Grand Valley State University, majoring in Liberal Studies, with an emphasis in Social Justice. She plans to return to Beijing in the summer of 2009 to do a follow-up of her research with the transgender, lesbian and gay population of the city.

Photos courtesy Vanessa Crowley.

Loved to Death: Cinque Terre

Lisa G. Sisson
Charles A. Baker-Clark

The Hospitality and Tourism Management Department of Grand Valley State University developed a faculty-led study abroad program in the northern Italian region of Piedmont in 2003. In 2007, two faculty members lived with 20 students in Piedmont for a period of four weeks. The overall objective of the program has been for students to learn about international tourism and the food culture of Italy through a process of cultural immersion.

As part of the program, students participate in field trips to a rural coastal area south of Genoa, Cinque Terre. This area, known as “The Five Lands,” or the land between the sea and sky, consists of five small villages perched on rocky outcrops at the foot of the Ligurian Apennine Mountains. The physical beauty of the area combined with the unique charm of the villages has lured tens of thousands of hikers and other tourists each year to Cinque Terre.

The increasing popularity of this distinctive area has placed considerable stress on its physical and social environment. This has prompted the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to designate Cinque Terre as a World Heritage site. World Heritage sites are recognized as having great cultural value that needs protection. In Cinque Terre, UNESCO recognizes a place of exceptional physical beauty where there is a harmonious balance between people and nature. It is in this context that students have an opportunity to learn about a unique tourist destination and the challenges to its physical and cultural heritage.



Photos courtesy Charlie Baker-Clark



The impacts of tourism in Cinque Terre cannot be ignored or overstated. In the towns' narrow streets throngs of tourists converge from early morning to late in the evening. During the day the narrow alleys are lined with vendors selling souvenirs; the small beaches are jammed with hundreds of people in scanty beachwear; and at the end of the day trash cans are overflowing

and beaches are awash in litter. Tourists gather in the miniscule squares to drink local wine and engage in noisy revelry into the early hours of the morning. Thousands of hikers crowd the steep mountain trails from early morning until dusk causing erosion and destruction of the native plants. The influx of swarms of tourists annually impacts not only the environment but the local culture developed through a lengthy symbiotic relationship of the people and the land. This heritage is expressed through the traditions and knowledge accumulated and handed down from one generation to the next.



The vineyards located on the steep mountainous slopes are integral to this heritage. The vines are grown on rocky terraced slopes traversed only with great difficulty. Each terrace, the width of one row of vines, is held in place by a mortar-less stone wall constructed of strategically placed dry sand stones laced with pebbles and earth. Without continuous maintenance the walls crumble and the vines die. Our students spent a day with a geography professor and park consultant, a vineyard owner, and a master stone builder. Through hiking the vineyards and assisting the wall builder we learned how the conversion of the area to a national park has promoted

revitalization of the vineyards. Local wall builders are paid by the park to restore the terraces while native landowners cultivate the vines and make the traditional wines. The national park sees it as their duty to be caretaker and guardian of the local heritage, protecting it from international influences. Without designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site the terraces would crumble and the population would have to rely on tourist income to support themselves. In Cinque Terre the students experienced the beauty and uniqueness of the area and witnessed the value of preserving cultures while promoting sustainable tourism techniques.



GLOBAL CONNECTIONS NEWSLETTER

Global Connections is printed twice per year by the Padnos International Center, a member of the College of Interdisciplinary Studies at Grand Valley State University. All content © 2008 Padnos International Center unless otherwise noted. All rights reserved; reproduction in whole or in part without prior written permission is prohibited. The opinions expressed by *Global Connections* contributors do not necessarily represent the opinions of *Global Connections* or the Padnos International Center. This newsletter was produced using environmentally-friendly linseed oil-based ink and paper containing 30% post-consumer fiber. If you would like to receive *Global Connections* via email, please subscribe online at www.gvsu.edu/pic.

PADNOS INTERNATIONAL CENTER

The mission of the Padnos International Center is to engage the community of Grand Valley State University in the development of meaningful international experiences which foster an appreciation and awareness of diverse cultures, people, and ideas.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Editor(s) and Designer(s):

Meaghann Myers-Smith and Gary VanHarn

Padnos International Center
Grand Valley State University
130 Lake Ontario Hall
1 Campus Drive
Allendale, MI 49401
Phone: (616) 331-3898
Fax: (616) 331-3899
Website: www.gvsu.edu/pic
Email: pic@gvsu.edu

SUBMISSIONS

The bulk of *Global Connections* content is unsolicited. We continually seek content for publication. We welcome submissions. Editorials and letters to the editor must include the author's name and email address or phone number. Submissions can be sent via email to the editor(s). Submissions are due June 30 for the Fall semester edition and November 30 for the Winter Semester edition.

Photo of Guatemalan children courtesy Chloe Skidmore.

