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Exploring Asian American Folklore

By Kathy Nadeau

The word folklore is as abstract a category as are the words Asian American, diaspora, globalization and culture. Folklore can contain religious or mythic elements but it also is concerned with what we do in our everyday lives. It can be used to transmit values or to defuse the stress and pressure that can build up in our lives.

Many ritual practices can be considered folklore, such as those that are acted out at birth, marriage or during religious festivals that are performed within the context of a family or community setting. For example, Hmong Americans, traditionally, preserve as sacred the placenta of a newborn child because they believe it to be their invisible jacket. This is the most precious clothing that they will wear when making that dangerous journey, after death, across an ether world, filled with giant poisonous caterpillars and other mythic creatures, to a place beyond time to reunite with their ancestors from whom they will be reborn.

Folklorists often invoke a common cliche that there are more definitions of folklore than there are folklorists. The Stuart Ellins Collection of Contemporary Native American Art, the first major collection to be donated to The Anthropology Museum, will be presented in an exhibit that will open in the fall of 2009. This collection includes about 160 items of 20th century art, primarily from the Southwest: ceramics, textiles, sand paintings, kachina dolls, and a sign and symbol of pan-Asian American pride, while the popular metaphor of the Twinkie, banana and coconut – yellow and/or brown on the outside but white on the inside – bespeaks the cultural identity struggles of growing up Asian in America. This collection of essays will examine the origin, migration, transmission, and development of Asian American folklore in all of its culturally diverse expressions and the subsequent production of Asian American communities and identities, and, above all, way of life.

Museum News

The government of Turkey and the Topkapi National Museum have invited The Anthropology Museum to host a traveling exhibit celebrating the work of the seventeenth-century Turkish cartographer, Kâtîb Çelebi. This exhibit will present replicas of some of Çelebi’s maps with commentary on their significance, as well as various other artifacts associated with Çelebi and his era.

It is planned that this exhibit will travel throughout North America, but it will debut at our museum, its only West Coast venue. The exhibit will open during the spring and continue for several weeks, but exact dates had not been settled at the time this note went to press, so keep in touch to not miss this fascinating exhibit.
and other materials. Using exclusively materials from the Ellins Collection, the upcoming exhibit will discuss the changing face of Southwestern Native Art in response to a changing world. The collection currently is being photographed by Rusty Thornton (B.A. in anthropology, 2002); these photographs will be used in the exhibit itself and in an anticipated online catalogue.

Exhibits are glitzy, but much of the important business of a museum is somewhat less glamorous. The materials that have been donated to the museum in the last few years include many delicate items that require climate control and special storage, and the university has responded to our needs by dedicating a new facility in the modular buildings for this storage. Once the move is complete, we shall start acquiring appropriate furniture for storage and continue the cataloguing process.

In the meantime, Natalie Kahn has trained as a docent for the current exhibit, "Handwriting," and has been conducting school groups on museum tours.

Finally, Enrique Gonzales-Salgado, the director of development for the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, has been working with the department actively to solicit funding to support and improve all of these projects.
Student News

Darlene Harr, anthropology major, is currently working as collections care assistant at the Western Center Museum in Hemet, and loving every minute of it. She is looking forward to working in the logistics of possibly working on the Madaba Plains Project in the Southern Levant, or elsewhere in Israel, during the summer.

Susana Jiménez, B.A. 2006, has received her M.A. in human behavior from National University.

Rut Nieves, B.A. 2007, is in South Korea and is busy studying language there.

Linda Stockham, B.A. 1975 and M.A. special major 1987, has had one of her one-act plays "Crossing Bells" selected as one of the 5 winners in the New Voices Short Play Competition at the Greenbrier Valley Theatre in Lewisburg, WV. A professional theatre company, it was part of a festival in January-February 2009. Linda is a resident of Lewisburg. Linda enjoys the fact that she can sit on her deck and watch deer, groundhogs, chipmunks, beautiful birds and cotton tails frolic just a few yards away. In addition, Linda is working for a law firm in Covington, Va., and does volunteer work for Carnegie Hall W.V., a performing arts hall in Lewisburg.

Jennifer Phillips (Allen), B.A. 1995, is currently attending Chapman University and has almost completed obtaining her multiple subject credential. She has yet to complete her student teaching or internship. She would like to receive a single subject in science, as well as social science.

Jeffrey W. Peterson, is a librarian at Cornell University Library in New York. One of our professors, Kathy Nadeau, ran into him at the Association for Asian Studies Conference held this past spring. Jeffrey is the librarian in charge of the collection on Southeast Asia.

Irene Armenta, B.A. 2002, is the Education Outreach Manager for Premier Exhibitions, Inc. Irene works in Las Vegas where her company is currently mounting exhibitions on the Titanic and on Bodies at the Luxor Casino.

Denise Manning, B.A. 2002, volunteers at the Perris Valley Historical & Museum Association where she did an internship in 2000. She just wrote a book, a coffee table, archival photo book, but with more information than your typical picture book. It turned out very nicely and sold like hotcakes! She also visited Easter Island, Antarctica, Rio and Iguasu Falls.

Dianne des Rosiers, is currently in Loreto running a friend's inn. She bought a piece of beach property there and is hoping to build a few beach cabanas someday soon. She says Baja has so much fantastic rock art in very remote places. She loves it there!

NEWS FROM THE LABORATORY FOR ANCIENT MATERIALS ANALYSIS

LAMA continues to receive requests for ancient organic analyses, and is chugging away on them.

We have received some pottery pigment samples from an Olmec-period archaeological investigation. Our job is to identify the organic binders in the pigments (there are a number of possibilities, including various orchids or nopal cactus pads). This will be the earliest identified adhesive on Mesoamerican pigments.

And we are receiving more glue samples from a colonial Mexican feather fan (currently in England), and also samples from a gourd found recently in the Templo Mayor excavations (it's suspected that it contains tobacco, but we'll see).

The Smithsonian storerooms have several extraordinary stone mosaic pieces from ancient Mexico, and Fran nie Berdan and a colleague from Alabama (Sue Scott) plan to study these more intensely over the next couple of years.

An important piece of the lab's completed research reached the public eye when Frannie and David Maynard (chair, chemistry) presented an invited paper in a symposium at the spring 2008 meeting of the Society for American Archaeology in Vancouver, Canada. This consisted of the identification of the glues on the famous funerary mask of the Mayan Lord Pakal of seventh century Palenque.

Seeking Support

The Anthropology Department is grateful to those who have donated to the department during the last year. In addition to the endowment established by the Archaeological Survey Foundation (see p.4), one anthropology major each quarter has received a $2000 scholarship thanks to the remarkable generosity of an anonymous donor. We are also slowly accumulating scholarship funds through donations from our own faculty, which we plan to begin to disburse in the next year or two. We hope that some of you will consider adding your donations to the department or designating a larger gift in your name or in someone else's honor. We have many needs, including scholarships, our Museum, student fieldwork and travel, and lab equipment.

If you would like to make a donation to the department, either contact Dr. Robertshaw or simply send us a check, letting us know if you have a preference for where we put your donation to use. For additional information on how to establish a named or endowed scholarship fund in the College, please contact our Director of Development, Enrique Gonzalez-Salgado at: (909) 537-7363.
Alpaca’s 2008-2009 Efforts Recap

From hiking at petroglyph sites to restoring the Pioneer cemetery in San Bernardino, ALPACA has kept busy this year applying classroom lessons to outside activities in the four fields of anthropology—archaeology, linguistics, physical anthropology, and cultural anthropology. What ties our group together is a common spirit for adventure that allows us to have fun in any situation or place.

We kicked off the school year camping at the Corn Springs petroglyph site (between Indio and Blythe), where we enjoyed great food and beautiful scenery. This important archaeological district is comprised of hundreds of rock art panels and food processing sites of the prehistoric Cahuilla and Yuman peoples.

Our next trip was supplemented by a night of speeches given by two students (Michelle Lynn and Kelley Nipper) who spent their summers studying primates in Costa Rica. The club ate pizza, listened to their stories and watched slide shows of their adventures before commuting to the Los Angeles Zoo for the Southern California Primate Research Forum. We were entertained by the current research projects of professionals in the field of primatology and also had an opportunity to see captive primates up close.

Department Receives Major Gift

Our department was absolutely delighted last year to receive a gift of $340,000 from the Archaeological Survey Foundation (ASF), which was recently supplemented by another check for $5400. This gift has established an endowment to support training in archaeology for our students. We will be able to use the interest earned on the principle each year to support our archaeological field school and/or student scholarships for field training. In addition, the ASF gave us a collection of paintings which the university will sell to raise more funds for the endowment. Although the ASF has disbursed its assets and ceased its operations, we hope that their generous donation will encourage others to support our department by adding to the endowment.

Student Scholarships & Awards

The following awards were handed out at the annual College of Social and Behavioral Sciences Awards Ceremony on June 7, 2008.

Department of Anthropology Scholarships were given to Caitlin Lamb, Natalie Kahn and Bryan Gorrie.

Outstanding Service to the Department was awarded to Aaron Castillo, who was also president of ALPACA for 2007-2008.

Outstanding Academic Achievements were given to Jessica F. Lieberman and Ashley O’Neill.

Corey Ragsdale received the Anna K.O. Sahagún Memorial Scholarship for 2008
Later in the quarter we accompanied Jenny Worth (CSUSB graduate student) and Jason Saenz (Anthropology Major) on a trip to the Oasis Trail south of Indio. The Desert Cahuilla Indians carved this trail out over many generations as they visited sites all over their vast homeland. We walked the trail that thousands of Cahuilla had walked before, and we witnessed the amazing rock art panels and trail shrines they had left behind. We ended the quarter at the Inka Trails Peruvian restaurant in Claremont to celebrate a successful beginning to the school year. Unfortunately for most, no guinea pig was served.

The first week of Winter Quarter, the ALPACAns carpooled to San Diego and visited both the Museum of Man and the Creationist Museum. It was interesting to see the wide spectrum of people's worldviews at each location. The bioanthro students enjoyed the exhibits on trephination at the Museum of Man, and they were amused to see how the Creationists believe genetics works.

Later in January, we attended a lecture given by David Earl at the San Bernardino County Museum about the changing architectural designs in a village in Peru from prehistoric to modern times.

During Darwin Week on the CSUSB campus (February 9th to the 13th) we also enjoyed lectures by Dr. Niewoehner, about recent findings in the study of human evolution, and Daniel McCarthy (U.S.F.S. Tribal Liaison/Archaeologist) who spoke about local Indian tribes in the Inland Empire and how they subsisted.

Before the year's end, ALPACA will participate in the Malki Museum Agave Roast led by Daniel McCarthy and the members of tribes across Southern California and the Colorado River Basin, attend a class taught by Serrano/Cahuilla elder Ernest Siva at the Dorothy Ramon Learning Center in March to learn about Serrano language and culture, and finally take a three day camping trip up California's highway 395 where stops will include Fossil Falls petroglyph site, Randsburg ghost town, and Manzanar WWII Japanese Internment Camp. The final trip will be a bittersweet end to what has been an exciting and eventful year for this club.

It is always enriching and gratifying to have the chance to discuss these topics with interested audiences. I hope by the end of the year to complete publications based on my Syrian research and also to begin a pilot project focused on Arab-Americans in the Inland Empire. I am developing a new course on the cultural anthropology of California to be offered next year (2009-2010), and I am scheduled to teach a new course on ethnographic field methods in spring 2009 quarter. In my role as ALPACA faculty adviser, I have been supportive of, and very impressed by, all the activities that the student club has undertaken, in large part due to the remarkable leadership skills of Natalie Kahn, the current ALPACA president.
University Press. I also found time to travel to Vancouver, Canada, to present a paper on Aztec feathered warrior costumes at the annual Society for American Archaeology meetings. And yes, they wore feathered warrior costumes. In September I presented an invited paper to the Pre-Columbian Society of Washington, adding on a few extra days to examine the extraordinary ancient Mexican collections in the storerooms of the National Museum of the American Indian and the Smithsonian Natural History Museum. In fall 2008 I headed back into the classroom, combining teaching and research. A book that has been long in the making (about 10 years), Ethnic Identity in Nahua Mesoamerica, finally appeared in press. This co-authored interdisciplinary book (there are six of us) is published by The University of Utah Press. An invited article also appeared in print: “Living on the Edge in an Ancient Imperial World: Aztec Crime and Deviance” in the journal Global Crime, volume 9, pages 20-34.

Jennifer Miller-Thayer

I am happy to report that a second edition of my book, Cultures of the United States, which I wrote with Lauren Arenson, has been published. Otherwise, I am still working hard writing my dissertation, as well as teaching both here and at Chaffey College.

Kathy Nadeau

Last summer, I received a mini-grant from the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences to conduct archival research in the Philippines. Also, I presented my paper “Globalization, Colonization, and Prostitution: Strange Carnage in the Philippines” at the International Conference on Philippine Studies held at the Philippine Social Science Center, and gave a public lecture at the Asian Center of the University of the Philippines.

As a student in the 1970s, I used to live in the dorm across the street from the Asian Center and remember seeing the first lady, Imelda Marcos, and foreign guests tracing up the steps of this center, which houses a national museum. Since then, the Republic of the Philippines has undergone many changes, not the least of which was the fall of the Marcos dictatorship. Filipinos today enjoy freedom of speech and a vibrant democratic way of life but many, also, are confronted in their daily lives with the deep problem of poverty.

One of my most curious experiences this summer occurred when I visited the Good Shepherd Sisters House, which rests in the heart of a congested and smog infested part of Manila. Under a dark soot laden bridge, onto a narrow sidewalk by a subway entrance, there is an indescribable gate that opens up into a green forested property that houses a boarding school for women and girls who were rescued from sex trafficking syndicates and prostitution rings. Interestingly, the sisters also operate the government’s mandatory orientation program that all mail order brides are required to complete before they will be issued a visa. There is a close relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and state in the Philippines, which has the largest Catholic population in the region.

What struck me most, aside from the girls’ stories, was my meeting with Sister Mary John Dumaug who was in charge of the kitchen. She worked with the indigenous people of Mindanao for 30 years and brought back a passion for caring for the earth and tilling the soil. She transformed the backyard, which used to be a mound of junk, into a beautiful organic garden, replete with tropical vegetables. There also is a small piggery in the garden. Unlike usual piggeries it does not emit a bad odor. The swine feed on a vegetable soup medley and, in between mealtimes, special leafy treats from the garden. Sister Mary John uses an environmentally friendly way of disposing their wastes that yields compost and organic fertilizers.

Finally, my book The History of the Philippines came out with Greenwood Press. On May 2, 2009, the Filipino students will perform their annual “Celebration of Filipino Culture” event to which you are cordially invited. For more details contact knadeau@csusb.edu or watch for the announcement on ALPACA listserve.

Wes Niewoehner

In 2008, I received a “mini grant” from our College of Social and Behavioral Sciences to conduct research on the comparative anatomy of modern human hand bones. To this end, I spent part of the summer on a data collection trip to Simon Fraser University; located just outside of Vancouver, Canada. I am interested in the collections at Simon Fraser because they include burials of people that
engaged in strenuous lifestyles that included acquiring marine resources and making and using stone tools.

One of my goals was to collect more data on the variation of modern human wrist bones in order to perform a more complete analysis of the Flores specimen that I wrote about in the last issue of our newsletter ("A New Human Species?"). I had major problems with some of my equipment, but I was able to repair it MacGyver-style (with some tape and a paper clip!) and my data collection trip was ultimately successful. I am now engaged in the slow process of data analysis.

While on my trip, it occurred to me that I should also collect data on finger bones, because in the back of my mind I kept thinking about a paper presented at the Paleanthropology meeting that claimed to demonstrate that Neandertals had penetrated into southern Siberia. If this was true it would mean that Neandertals actually extended their range much further to the east than was previously thought. The evidence for their Siberian occupation is a few non-diagnostic human remains (some isolated teeth and incomplete limb bones) from Okladnikov cave (in the northern foothills of the Altai mountain range), including a well preserved finger bone.

The problem with this site is that this is a region where early modern humans are found too, so it is possible that these are the remains of modern humans and not Neandertals. I decided to find out, therefore, if it is possible to definitively distinguish early modern human and Neandertal finger bones from each other. I am currently in negotiations to get research access to the Okladnikov finger bone so that I can apply my analysis to see whether or not it likely belongs to a Neandertal.

On the family-front, I am happy to report that my son entered CSUSB as a freshman in the fall of 2008. I doubt that he will be an anthropologist, but he has promised that he will take some anthropology classes.

Jim Pierson

I am in the next to last year of my participation in the Cal State system's early retirement program, so the end is getting near. I continue to teach a few classes each year, including the Australian one last year, and I enjoy the continuing interaction with students and my colleagues. I am also on several committees, some of which are more fun than others. I am currently investigating the possibility of a somewhat informal (meaning no dues) anthropology alumni group, so any graduates reading this will likely hear from me in the next year or so. In fact, anyone who is interested and/or has some ideas, contact me at jpierson@csusb.edu when you feel the inspiration.

I plan to continue working on my Australian writing projects, especially while I can still use CSUSB's computers and electricity. I still read mystery novels that emphasize specific cultures; an article I wrote about using these novels in anthropology courses was published in a reader in early 2009. I must add that I became a grandfather twice last year and am doing my best to spoil both grandchildren. I am also very good at putting them to sleep by showing them Margaret Mead videos.

Peter Robertshaw

I have recently been appointed the North American and book reviews editor for the academic journal, Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa, which is published three times per year. I am discovering that this job involves quite a lot of work, though I do get to read interesting articles before they are published.

I participated in two international conferences last year. At the Society for American Archaeology conference in Vancouver, I presented a paper, entitled "Beyond the segmentary state: creative and instrumental power in western Uganda," that discussed the complex pre-colonial politics of the region. In the summer I traveled to Frankfurt, where I spoke on "Two tonnes of excavated potsherds: reflections on state formation in Uganda."

The paper I wrote with Bill Duncan, a former student and now an alumnus, on "African Slavery: Archaeology and Decentralized Societies" appeared as a chapter in the book Invisible Citizens: Captives and their Consequences published by the University of Utah Press.

Ellen Gruenbaum

A former member of the anthropology faculty from 1986 to 1994 and acting dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Science from 1994 to 1996, has left CSU Fresno and is now the head of the anthropology department at Purdue University in Indiana.
Gustatory Corner: Algivory

By Russell Barber

The lower plants are the non-flowering plants that reproduce through spores, like molds, algae, yeasts and fungi. Fungus, in the form of mushrooms, does pretty well on the American table, but Americans more typically overlook lower plants as food, relegating them to minor culinary roles, like making blue cheese blue or turning barley water into beer. Around the world, though, many lower plants – particularly algae – are foodstuffs that occasionally assume significant roles in diet. Thus we come to algivory: the eating of algae.

Asia rightfully is one of the heartlands for algivory, with at least a dozen species of seaweed (a more elegant name for marine algae) regularly used in Japan alone. Nori, konbu, and hijiki are dried, then used for broths, snacks, and the green wrappers of sushi. Seaweed also is eaten widely in coastal areas of the rural British Isles, pickled with vinegar and mustard seeds to make sloke in Ireland; crumbled into scone dough and baked into biddies in Scotland; and boiled, pulped, sautéed and sauced with lemon juice and butter in Wales to accompany roasts. The latter is so prized that it traditionally is served on silver platters, at least in wealthy households.

The Aztecs of central Mexico skimmed pond scum, a mixture of various freshwater algae, drained it, and pressed it into cakes called tecuitlatl (“stone dung”). Its texture was said to be pleasant, somewhat resembling a soft, nutty cheese. Some anthropologists, notably Michael Harner, have seen the consumption of tecuitlatl as an indicator of dietary desperation among a starving people, but most have seen it as a clever way to exploit an abundant natural foodstuff.

Algae are low in protein, fat and calories, and their primary contribution to human nutrition is in minerals. They abound in calcium, potassium, phosphorus and even iron; hijiki has about twice the iron, ounce for ounce, as beef! Marine algae also have lots of iodine, an element required for survival but often scanty in human diet. Why is such a nutritionally-valuable food so often spurned? Probably because of algin, a sticky substance occurring in most algae. Unless specially treated, algae cook into a nasty colloidal mess that many people find disagreeable. Drying, long-cooking, or mixing with acids will counteract the stickiness, and all these approaches appear in the examples given above. Alternatively, one can embrace the thick texture and exploit it in the most common American food use for algae: a source of gums to thicken salad dressing, evaporated milk and yoghurt.