

2019 January Newsletter



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
Weatherhead East Asian Institute



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January 2003

The Weatherhead East Asian Institute, founded in 1949, is the interdisciplinary center for research, studies, and publication on modern and contemporary East and South-east Asia at Columbia University. The Institute's distinguished faculty members come from Columbia's Schools of Arts and Sciences; Architecture; Planning and Preservation; Business; International and Public Affairs; Law; Social Work; Barnard College; and Teachers College. The Institute also hosts a diverse group of visiting scholars, professionals, and students from the United States and abroad.

Since 1960, the U.S. Department of Education has designated Columbia as an East Asian National Resource Center, which is housed at WEAI. The Institute is also one of the leading centers for developing K-12 teacher resource and training programs about Asia in the United States. WEAI alumni have gone onto prominent careers in business, government, international NGOs, and nonprofits across the globe.

In 2019, the Institute will mark its 70th anniversary. The year-long calendar of commemorative activities will begin with a formal reception in February celebrating the Lunar New Year. Throughout 2019, WEAI's already robust schedule of activities will be enriched by additional programs to honor the Institute's founding in 1949, celebrate achievements of the past seven decades, and explore new directions for the study of East and Southeast Asia.

As part of these activities to commemorate the Institute's seven decades of achievement, WEAI is launching this monthly newsletter to complement the weekly news blasts with more in-depth coverage of the Institute's history and work.

Weatherhead East Asian Institute

Columbia University
International Affairs Building
420 West 118th Street
New York, NY 10027

Director

Eugenia Lean

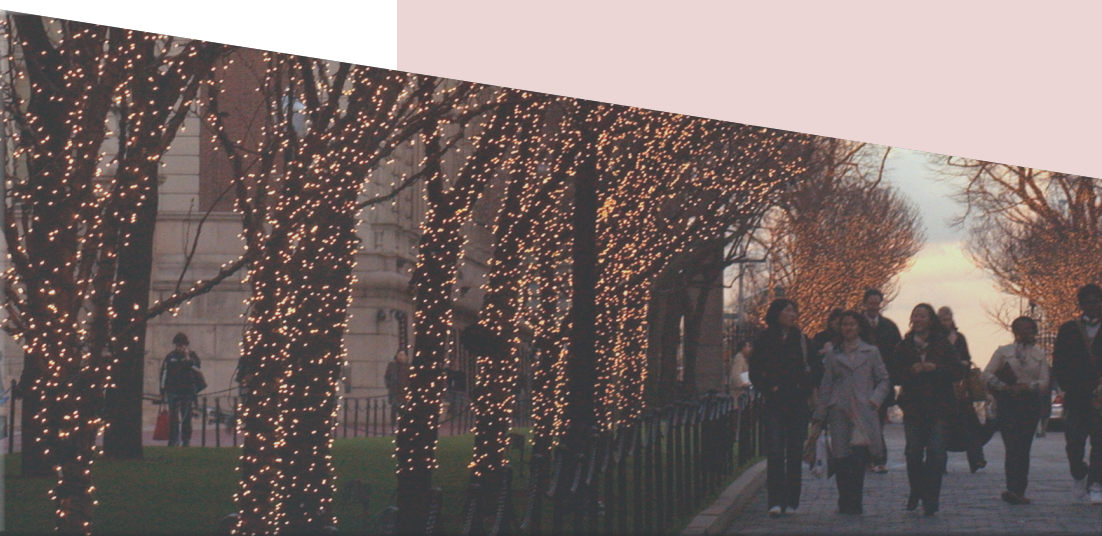
Executive Director

Nicole Vartanian

For more information, visit

weai.columbia.edu

For inquiries, please contact Ariana King
ak4364@columbia.edu



Sir George Sansom, first director of the East Asian Institute (1949-1953)



Sir George
Bailey Sansom
1883-1965

Written by Richard Lo,
with guidance from Carol Gluck

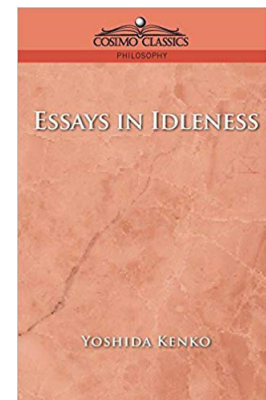
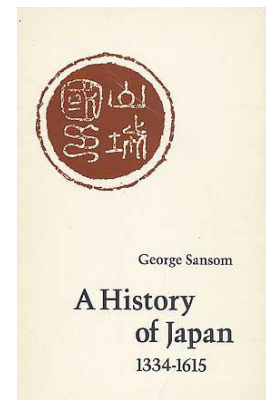
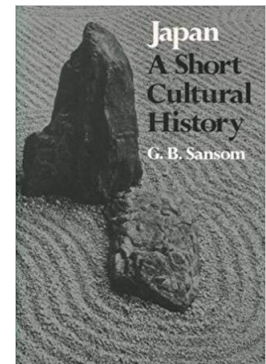
Sir George Bailey Sansom was the inaugural director of the East Asian Institute (renamed the Weatherhead East Asian Institute in 2003). A longtime British diplomat and eminent scholar of Japanese history and culture, Sir George was born in London in 1883. In 1903, he entered the British Diplomatic Service and spent much of the period between 1903 and 1940 attached to the Embassy in Tokyo.

From his early days there, Sir George used his spare time to immerse himself in the study of Japan. In 1911 he published a translation of the 14th-century literary work *Tsurezuregusa*. His masterwork, *Japan: a Short Cultural History*, appeared in 1931, selling widely and introducing Japan to readers around the world.

Sir George first lectured at Columbia in 1935 and again in 1940. He then served in the British Embassy in Washington, DC, where he was influential in the pre-surrender planning for postwar Japan. He was the British representative of the Far Eastern Advisory Commission from 1945 until 1947, when he was appointed Professor of Japanese Studies at Columbia.

In 1949 he became the founding Director of its East Asian Institute, inviting his fellow Japan expert, the American Hugh Borton, to join him. When Sir George left Columbia in 1953, Borton became the second director of the East Asian Institute. Both men played an important role in shaping Allied policy, bringing a deep knowledge of Japanese history and society to bear on US policies toward postwar Japan.

His lifelong engagement with Japanese people and culture on the one hand, and his extraordinary research and elegant writing on the other, made Sir George a pioneering presence in modern scholarship about Japan.





Ria Koopmans-de Bruijn is head of public services and librarian at C.V. Starr East Asian Library

C.V. Starr's Ria Koopmans reveals librarians' role in un hiding the hidden artifacts of East Asia

Interviewed by Ariana King

“One major misconception a lot of people have is that all librarians do is work with books and that we read books—I wish I sometimes had time to read.”

Ria Koopmans is head of public services at the C.V. Starr East Asian Library, where she also works as a librarian with a specialty in Western language materials on East Asia. Koopmans has worn many hats since joining the Columbia community in 1993. Though she began in collection development, selecting appropriate texts for inclusion in the library's collection, these days, she also coordinates public services and maintains the library's special collections, in addition to carrying out essential inventory tasks. It is a wide-ranging job that extends far beyond the book sorting and shushing of librarians depicted in popular culture.

Some may be surprised to learn the critical role librarians like Koopmans play in the preservation of historical artifacts and in ensuring that the significance of such texts and materials is known. Koopmans recounted the case of a former colleague, a conservator who came in on Saturdays to work undisturbed in the lab to repair a delicate Japanese scroll, “because on work days when her colleagues were there, just by passing by, they would create wind to make those pieces flutter away.”

So essential are librarians that in many cases their departure also means the loss of all memory of given object's history. “There are probably quite a few items in our collection where I am the only person who knows that we actually have it,” Koopmans said. The risk of losing such knowledge is one that the university has recognized and is actively working to reduce, she noted. Past record-keeping has not always been up to par; “so what we're trying to

do now is to collect what information we can, particularly when it comes to material that was donated,” she said.

“We try to trace as best we can who donated and when; and if at all available, for what purpose, and in what condition,” Koopmans said. It is a daunting task, and there is a high likelihood that much of that information will never be recouped. “But it's no hardship for me to do all this puzzling and digging to find out more about a collection,” she admitted. In one serendipitous discovery made during the course of this excavation, Koopmans, who is Dutch, came across an unidentified document in her native language. In reading the text, she realized that it raised a number of potential research questions. Koopmans will be presenting a paper on the document at the 11th International Convention of Asian Scholars in Leiden, The Netherlands, in July.

The C.V. Starr East Asian Library has recently ramped up record-keeping and cataloging efforts as part of a university-led push to “unhide hidden collections.” Koopmans is leading the preparations for a treasures exhibition, to be unveiled at an opening reception on April 18, that will highlight a number of lesser known or unknown items in order to create awareness about their existence.

“It has been determined that whatever is going into the exhibit will have to have a catalog record, and so there is pressure to catalog these materials,” Koopmans said.



*The C.V. Starr East Asian Library on
a late winter afternoon*

But tracking down information and recording it accurately are not the only challenges the librarians face. “It is comparatively easy to collect material and not all that hard to catalog most material once you get to it; but housing is an important thing,” Koopmans said. “If something is fragile, you can’t just put it on the shelf. It needs to be protected, and also in exhibits you need to take care that it’s exhibited in such a way that it won’t come to harm, and at the same time is shown to its best.” Even simply placing a fragile paper scroll near sunlight is enough to potentially damage its contents, she noted.

Of the many changes the East Asian library has undergone throughout the years, nothing has been more consequential than the rise of digital technology and the subsequent ease of access in viewing texts and documents online. This has greatly improved researchers’ ability to interact with materials they might not have been able to otherwise. But the trend toward digitization does not mean libraries have become obsolete.

There is something
highly special and
highly unique to
artifacts.”

“There is something highly special and highly unique to artifacts,” said Koopmans. “You can put a digital image online, but that doesn’t really equal seeing the 3D object, or being able to touch it.”

“It’s a story you hear over and over from colleagues in special collections—that when students first come into the special collections and get to see and actually touch these materials, it does something to them,” Koopmans said, adding that this unique experience can not be digitally replicated. “And it is important to maintain those items.”



STUDENT PROFILE

Hana Lethen
PhD student
East Asian Languages
and Cultures

Hana Lethen is a recipient of the competitive Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowship, awarded through the Weatherhead East Asian Institute for intensive study of an East Asian language at the advanced level.

Born in Greece, Hana spent most of her life in Texas. She graduated in 2017 from Princeton University, where she majored in comparative literature, focusing on Japanese and Russian cultural studies, and is currently a student in the East Asian Languages and Cultures department at Columbia.

Last year, she was living in Yamaguchi, Japan on a Princeton-in-Asia fellowship, working in university administration while pursuing her interests in Japanese literature, ballet, and Noh theater.

It was for language study that I originally came to Japan during my undergraduate years. At that time, during a semester at the Kyoto Consortium for Japanese Studies, I was able to take a course on traditional Japanese theater. That experience, combined with my lifelong passion for the performing arts, led me to a fascination with Noh, one of the oldest existing forms of theater in the world. I am now in the middle of a year in Yokohama, where I am studying advanced Japanese at the Inter-University Center for Japanese Studies (IUC), before entering EALAC's PhD program this coming fall to study premodern Japanese performance.

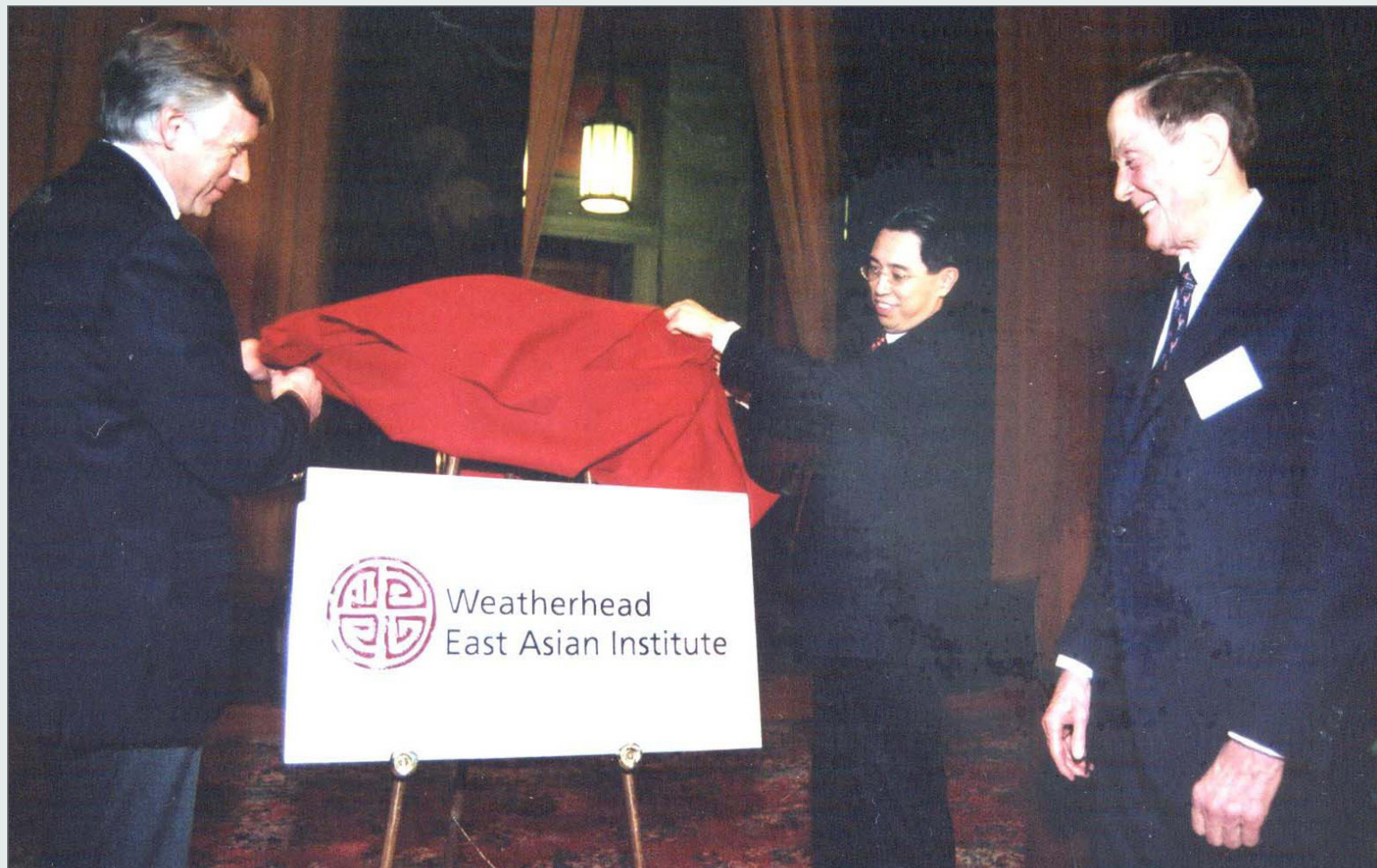
At IUC, I am receiving unparalleled training in reading and writing, as well as in presenting and discussing my research in Japanese. I have enjoyed being part of the stimulating environment comprised of the other 50 students in the program, most of whom are pursuing graduate research in Japanese studies or careers at Japanese companies. IUC has challenged and encouraged me to hone my Japanese to an academic level.

I have also had opportunities for enrichment outside of classes. I am learning Noh chant and dance on a weekly basis, and I have also been able, with IUC's support, to attend Noh, bunraku (traditional puppet theater) and nihon buyō (Japanese dance) performances, as well as numerous other cultural workshops and events. My time in Yokohama has been incredibly fruitful so far, and I am eager to see what the second half of the program holds!



ON THIS MONTH IN 2003:

EAST ASIAN INSTITUTE NAMED FOR WEATHERHEAD FOUNDATION



Columbia University President Lee C. Bollinger; Xiaobo Lu, director of the East Asian Institute; and Albert Weatherhead, III at a ceremony renaming the Institute in honor of the Weatherhead Foundation's commitment to East Asian studies at Columbia

January 27, 2003

Excerpts from the Columbia News archive follow:

“The new Weatherhead East Asian Institute is a testament to Albert and Celia Weatherhead’s remarkable role in educating generations of students about Asia,” stated President Lee C. Bollinger. “The Weatherheads have long supported Columbia’s academic strength in East Asian studies. The Institute now stands as a symbol of their dedication for future generations.”

“The East Asian Institute is a national treasure with a breadth of initiatives touching almost every aspect of a dynamic region,” said Albert Weatherhead, III. “Attaching our efforts, thought and funding to the Institute has been a long cherished dream, and the naming of the Institute forges another enduring link between the Weatherhead family and Columbia.”

Full article available at: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/news/03/01/weatherhead_eai.html