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Looking West to Find the East

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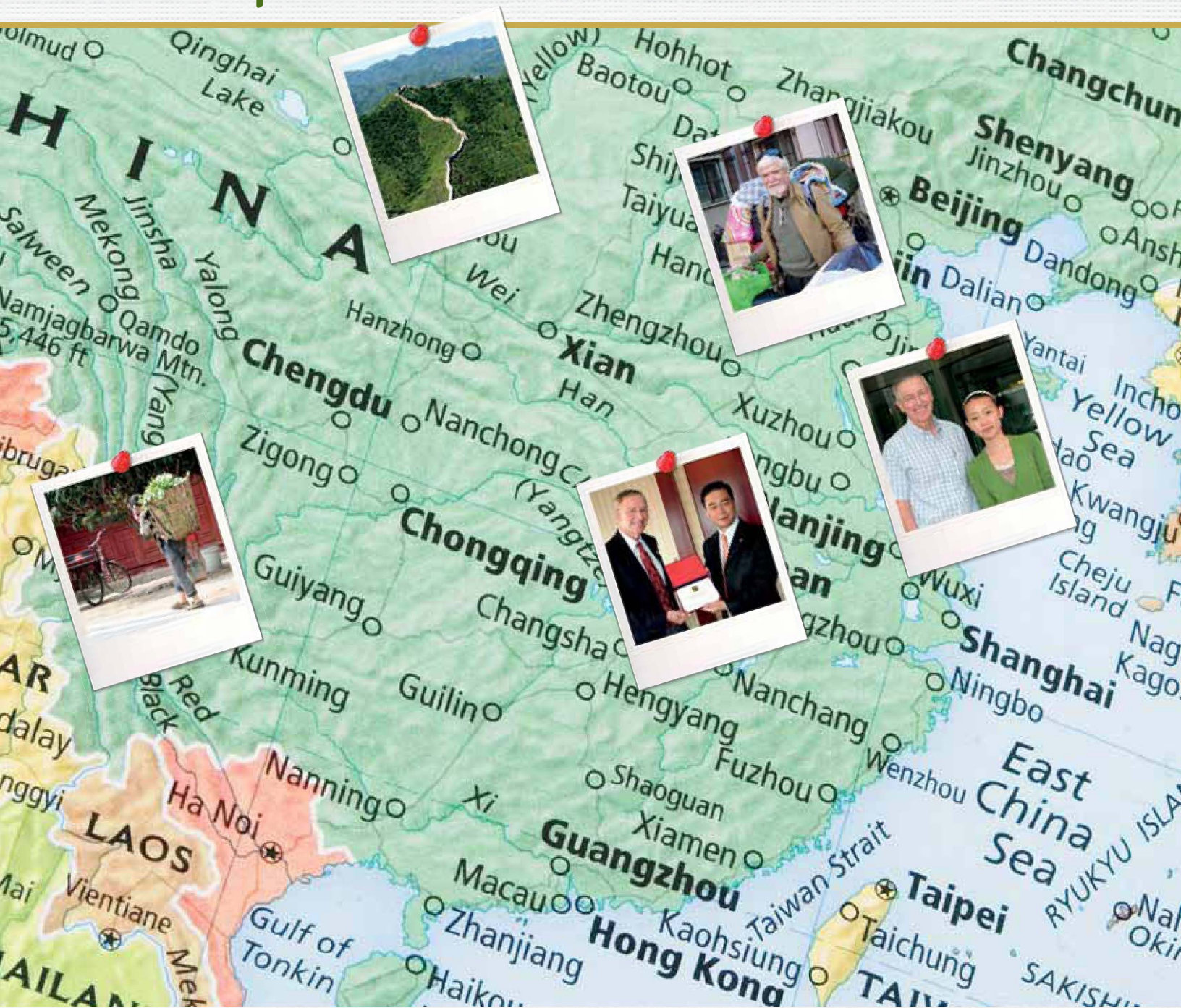
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Looking west to find the East





Increasingly, Linfield College is looking west — beyond the steps of Pioneer Hall, past the Oak Grove, the Oregon coast and the Pacific Ocean, to East Asia. Asia offers incredible economic opportunity. More of our friends and neighbors are either working in Asia or working for Asian companies in the United States. In the coming years, students who study the Mandarin language and Chinese

history, philosophy and culture, or Japanese, Korean or Vietnamese language and culture, will have a leg up on their peers. We can expect to see more Asian students studying at Linfield, and more Linfield students and faculty traveling there. Through a variety of partnerships and programming, Linfield is bridging the gap between McMinnville and the Asian continent to benefit global learners.



The first time Chris Keaveney set foot in Japan, it was the middle of the night and he did not know a soul.

Hired to teach at a local American school in Kobe, he arrived a month early to acclimate. He spoke no Japanese and he was whisked from the airport to a sparse apartment

and left on his own.

“I really didn’t see anyone for several weeks, until school started,” said Keaveney, who was 24 at the time. “I didn’t speak the language. I was lost. There were days I wouldn’t speak to one human being. It was the loneliest time of my life.”

Fortunately for Linfield students, the experience of being an ethnic minority has stayed with Keaveney, associate professor of Japanese and this year’s Edith Green Distinguished Professor. In preparation for study abroad, Keaveney fortifies students with language skills, cultural knowledge and a welcoming support system once they arrive. Soft-spoken and calm, he nods graciously as he talks and listens, a reflection of the Asian culture that has shaped his life.

“China is a land of contrasts and I certainly found that to be true,” said Bruce Wyatt, vice president for college relations, who explored educational opportunities throughout the country over the summer. Clockwise from bottom right, Linfield students in Yokohama, Japan; Wyatt and Qian Wang, an instructor from Peking University who is teaching at Linfield this year; Wyatt, who attended the 10th anniversary celebration of Sias International University, with founder Shawn Chen ’87; a Chinese woman talks on a cell phone while carrying a basket on her back; The Great Wall of China; Jim Diamond, professor of chemistry, worked in the Beijing lab of former student Jingsong Zhu ’93; Jennifer Stewart ’10 attended Yonsei University in Seoul, South Korea.



Xiao Liu '13 of Chengdu, China, plays the zheng at the International Culture Show in October. The annual event at Linfield features the music, fashion and food of international and study abroad students.

In the dozen years he's been at Linfield, Keaveny has created and nurtured the Asian Studies program into one of the strongest in the Pacific Northwest, with more study-abroad options than most other institutions. Modest and unassuming, he points out that he is building on a foundation established in the 1930s when Elam Anderson, then Linfield president, made initial connections in China. But Keaveny has made his own connections. Linfield now averages more than 35 students majoring and minoring in Japanese and Asian Studies annually. And that number continues to grow.

Keaveny has often been called Linfield's "Asia guy," and the title fits, according to John Sagers, associate professor of history, who specializes in Asian history.

"Chris has been the driving force in the Linfield Asian Studies program," said Sagers. "He brings tremendous energy and enthusiasm to his teaching and scholarly work."

Linfield's "Asia guy"

Although he is known as the "Asia guy," Keaveny had no international experience as an undergraduate college student. With a bachelor's degree in English and a yearning to travel, he spent two years teaching English in American Samoa before moving to Japan and finding his niche. There, Keaveny taught English and attended Japanese language classes with kindergarteners to learn *kanji*, the written Chinese characters also used in Japanese, folding his long legs under elementary desks that came to his knees.

"I was determined that I would be literate," he said. Soon, Keaveny tackled Chinese, too. "From the beginning I was interested in the relationship between the two languages and cultures. Chinese was always an opportunity for me to come up for air and do something

different from Japanese. The two complement each other nicely.”

He discovered a knack for teaching, a love of Asian cultures and met his future wife, Shigeko. The two married in 1991, with ceremonies in both Japan and the U.S., and are raising their two daughters bilingually, returning to Japan for visits.

Both from his own experiences and those of his students, Keaveney knows the benefits of living abroad.

“It changes your perspective about your home country and yourself,” he said. “I never thought much about American policies and the American way of life until I was abroad and experienced something different. You look inward and find your values.”

Following his destiny

Keaveney was hooked on Linfield before ever setting foot in Oregon. With a Ph.D. in Japanese and comparative literature nearly finished, he set out to find a small liberal arts institution and still has the 1996-97 Linfield catalog that originally captivated him.

“I read about the ‘Linfield smile’ and how (former president) Vivian Bull responded personally to student emails at 11:30 p.m.,” he recalled. “It seemed like a great place. It just looked right, somehow.”

On any given day, Keaveney wears a number of hats – teacher, counselor, translator, Taiko drummer, division chair and department co-chair. The variety is what he loves best. That, coupled with the small college atmosphere, makes Linfield a nearly perfect fit for Keaveney.

“I like the close interaction – sitting down with students to talk about different programs, housing questions or whatever else comes up,” he said. “It requires a number of different skill sets and I like that. It’s a great fit for me. Linfield was my destiny. I felt it when I first arrived and I’ve felt it ever since.”

His students, including Amy Shoemaker ’09, call him personable and engaging. In class, Keaveney uses TV clips and daily experiences to reinforce examples, punctuating responses with *hai*, yes, good. Students respond to the active learning.

Chris Keaveney, pictured with KGU student Yuki Itakura (center) and Katelyn Tamashiro ’13, founded the Linfield Taiko drummer group in 2002, even constructing the drums himself from donated wine barrels and cowhides. The group is open to students and community members.

“He’s very organized and we covered a lot of material,” said Shoemaker, who earned an education degree with a minor in Japanese. “He’s approachable, and once he knows you understand the language, he speaks only Japanese with you.”

Keaveney encourages students to speak the language – in class, at language tables, and through groups such as Japanese Culture Club and the Taiko drummers. One former drummer, Lena Kim ’06, was Linfield’s second Japanese major and is now in her second year teaching math at McMinnville High School. She supervises the Japanese Club at the high school and has introduced her high school students to the Taiko group.

“His passion and his love for Japan transfers to his students,” said Kim, who taught in Japan through the JET program after graduating from Linfield. “He inspired me to learn more Japanese and go to Japan. He tried to get us to discover concepts on our own, which helped me learn more. I hope I’ve learned a few of his tricks to use in my own classroom.”

Keaveney said small classes and close interactions are important parts of what makes Linfield special. He knows his students well and stays in close contact with them even during their study abroad experience. He compares teaching to the fountain of youth.

“There’s an excitement and energy that comes from young people,” he said. “Every time I go into the classroom, even now, even mid-semester with students I know, I always get butterflies in my stomach. Every time. I love that exhilaration. And I think when that feeling goes away, I should quit teaching.” ■

– Laura Davis

