

OBERLIN SHANSI ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021



OBERLIN SHANSI



India Fellow Madeleine Gefke hiking in Wyoming

OUR VISION

Deepening mutual respect and understanding through exchange between Asia and the United States.

OUR MISSION

Shansi facilitates experiential learning and nurtures mutually beneficial exchanges between Oberlin College & Conservatory and partners in Asia. Shansi's programs have a transformative impact, empowering individuals, institutions, and communities to be leaders in cross-cultural engagement.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Shansi Friends and Supporters,

As I write this letter in early 2022 reflecting on the 2020-2021 Shansi year, nearly two years since Covid-19 changed all of our lives, I am struck again by the resilience and adaptability of the Shansi community. This starts with our Oberlin-based team, and especially Shansi Deputy Director Ted Samuel, who has supported three cohorts of Shansi Fellows through incredibly challenging times.

Just as impressive have been the exemplary group of Fellows who have remained engaged despite the pandemic. This includes the Fellows who evacuated their sites in February and March 2020 but continued to work and teach remotely out of dedication to their students and host institutions. And then there is the new cohort of Fellows who completed their orientation in January 2020 filled with excitement but have found themselves teaching and working from the US instead. All of these Fellows have found ways to have memorable experiences and build strong relationships despite the distance, showing how creative Obies can be when faced with a challenge!

The exceptions to this remote experience are our Japan and Independent Fellows. The J.F. Oberlin University Fellows returned to Machida in winter 2020 and the new Fellows arrived in September 2021. Our Independent Fellow spent the bulk of their Fellowship in Taiwan as planned. As you read the entries prepared by the Fellows in this report, you will be able to see how varied these Fellowship experiences have been, and the impressive dedication and inspiration our Fellows have brought to their work.

Here in Oberlin, life has been quieter than usual with no Visiting Scholars or In-Asia Grants. However, Shansi did launch one important new initiative. In response to the rising tide of anti-Asian hate crimes, the Shansi team established the AAPI Experience Grant in Spring 2021 and issued the first two grants with the support of several Asian American student organizations, the Department of Comparative American Studies, and the Multi-Cultural Resource Center. Take a look at the back interior cover of this report for more information.

I hope you enjoy this report, and I encourage you to engage with us online through our refreshed website, on Facebook and Instagram, and on our YouTube channel, which features several new videos, including reflections on Shansi's celebration of 70 years of partnerships in India.

I also want to thank Shansi's alumni and friends for your generous support this year. Your gifts allowed us to launch the Keystone Foundation partnership, continue new programs like the Hiroshima and Independent Fellowships, and to provide special support to the Fellows affected by the pandemic evacuations. As we face more challenges in the coming year, we will count on you to help Shansi continue to build bridges and join worlds.

Sincerely,



Gavin Tritt
Executive Director

Cover (clockwise from top left): Ava Prince exploring the Tama River in Okutama, Japan: Meenakshi Temple in Madurai, India: and Fellow Le'Priya White with her students in Taigu

SHANSI FELLOWSHIPS

Shansi Fellowships offer recent Oberlin graduates life-changing opportunities to work with Shansi's longstanding university and nongovernmental organization partners in China, India, Indonesia, and Japan, or craft their own opportunities to work nearly anywhere in Asia as Independent Fellows. They spend two years immersed in their Fellowships, and while working, they study language, learn local arts, volunteer with local organizations, travel, and find myriad ways to engage in local communities. For the last two years, Fellows for China, India, and Indonesia have worked remotely from the US, connecting with students and communities despite the vast distance. Their annual narratives at www.shansi.org and their posts on the Shansi Instagram account tell their stories in their own voices.

CHINA

Shanxi Agricultural University in Taigu, Shanxi, is Oberlin Shansi's historical partner. Fellows teach conversational and written English to undergraduate English majors and graduate students in various disciplines.

Shanxi Agricultural University



Le'Priya White beside a rain drum in Taigu

LE'PRIYA WHITE '19 spent months mentally preparing herself for what life could be like as a Black person in China. Though only being in Asia for about six months, she learned so much about herself and what it's like to travel to places where locals aren't used to people like her. From taking pictures with curious strangers or having her picture taken, from making sure she could pack as many hair supplies and clothes as she can because being Black and plus-sized doesn't quite mesh well together there, she's proud of herself for making it through and being able

to teach her students about her culture. The acceptance from most students was shocking but she was appreciative of it and it made the experience worth it. It was hard some days but being able to share the moments she did with her students made it all worth it and she definitely wouldn't change a thing!

For the past year, JENNIFER LIN '20 has been teaching virtually from her home in New York. While the pandemic caused major changes to Jenn's time as a fellow, she has tried to create meaningful connections with her students. Inspired by the language tables she attended at Oberlin, Jenn held bi-weekly weekly office hours so that students could practice conversation outside of class. Popular topics included movies, music, and popular culture. During one office hour, Jenn and her students threw a listening party and exchanged music recommendations. Jenn had the opportunity to listen to rock classics like BEYOND's "海闊天空" and popular pop ballads like "平凡之路". Jenn hopes that she can someday meet her students in person.

REX SIMMONS '19 has been living in Ypsilanti, Michigan while teaching online for Shanxi Agricultural University. In his first semester, Rex structured his classes to accommodate varied language levels, offering modified assignments and optional readings for students with an exceptional interest in English learning. In his second semester, he structured his classes around scenes from TV shows and movies to expose his students to language in context and build confidence in casual conversation. While he awaits visa authorization, he has been writing and recording music, hiking, and practicing Mandarin over video.

INDIA

Shansi's two partners in Tamil Nadu provide opportunities for Fellows to experience India's incredible linguistic and cultural diversity while developing their professional skills. At Lady Doak College in Madurai, the Shansi Fellow serves as the Manager of Student Programs, where they design global engagement programs, support international service-learning projects, and teach extracurricular courses. The Fellowship program at Lady Doak College will resume in 2022. At Keystone Foundation in Kotagiri, the Fellows work with a dynamic nongovernmental organization (NGO) dedicated to environmental conservation and the advancement of indigenous Adivasi communities living in the Nilgiri Biosphere.

Keystone Foundation

MADELEINE GEFKE '20 began her Fellowship at Keystone Foundation virtually due to the pandemic. She met with her mentors through early morning and late night video calls to check in, receive project assignments, and provide updates on progress. Madeleine has contributed to editing, assembling, and drafting a proposal on the sustainable use of natural resources in India; managed an agroecology and tree phenology survey database for the Barefoot Ecologists program; and conducted literature reviews on biodiversity and the implementation of the Forest Rights Act for a report to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Madeleine continues to practice Tamil with one of her wonderful mentors through exchanges of stories, written journal entries, conversations, and sharing creative projects. Outside her Keystone projects, Madeleine has enjoyed tutoring kids, volunteering at urban farms in DC, planting a garden with her neighbor, and zooming with friends, family, and the Shansi community.



Madeleine Gefke on a hike in Wyoming where she worked at a wilderness camp

INDONESIA

At Gadjah Mada University (UGM) in Yogyakarta, Fellows work as teaching assistants or independent instructors at the Faculty of Cultural Sciences and the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies. At Syiah Kuala University in Banda Aceh, Shansi Fellows teach English reading, writing, and speaking as well as occasional specialized courses to undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty. At the same time, Syiah Kuala University faculty visit Oberlin College as Visiting Scholars to explore new teaching pedagogies and co-curricular programs.

Gadjah Mada University

In her first year at UGM, KARA NEPOMUCENO '20 explored the interplay between teaching, language-learning, and creative practice. Working remotely from San Diego, she taught two live speaking tutorials and an academic writing course over Zoom in collaboration with senior fellow Sydney Allen. In September 2021, she also completed 180 hours of Indonesian language study with her Alam Bahasa teachers, Lia and Siwi. Outside the classroom, Kara wrote for the online journal thINKingDANCE and danced in outdoor and virtual performances with Samahan Philippine Performing Arts & Maraya Performing Arts Collective.



Kara Nepomuceno as part of a circus themed local dance performance in San Diego

SYDNEY ALLEN '19 spent the second year of her fellowship teaching writing and journalism classes remotely in Indonesia, freelance writing for a variety of online publications worldwide, and editing texts for researchers and non-profit organizations in Indonesia. Since her Shansi Fellowship ended, Sydney has worked as an Associate Editor at Global Voices, an international online news organization, where she edits articles for the Asia team, works on an environmental journalism campaign, and writes news articles about Indonesia. She lives in Bali and plans to travel around Southeast Asia once it becomes safe. She credits the Shansi team for teaching her how to navigate a global workplace and giving her the opportunity to explore her passion for journalism during her fellowship.

Syiah Kuala University

EMILY PETERSON '19 spent the second year of her fellowship teaching remotely from the attic of her parents' home in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Although the time difference and technical difficulties made teaching challenging, she enjoyed connecting with students again and creating fun games and activities that translated to Zoom. She also continued to proofread academic articles for the Syiah Kuala University Language Center. Outside of teaching, Emily worked in the produce department of a small local grocery store and completed various baking projects.



Emily Peterson is proud of her latest creation - a lovely tarte tatin

In October 2020, EMILY EISENSTEIN '19 returned to finish the second year of her fellowship in Machida, Japan. With her remaining time, she sought outdoor spaces where she could more easily socialize and find community. This led to a blossoming interest in agriculture, which has continued to develop in different contexts. Emily enjoyed working in a community garden and taking group nature walks while volunteering at a job training center for people with disabilities. Later, while visiting the countryside of Kyushu, she learned about permaculture by living in an “eco-village.” Working with her hands and learning about sustainable living from local experts deepened Emily’s appreciation for Japan’s agricultural tradition. Going forward, she dreams of someday getting the hang of cooking daikon radishes just right.

JAPAN

Shansi Fellows at J.F. Oberlin University teach first-year students in the English Language Program, provide one-on-one tutoring through the department’s Writing Center, and support a wide range of extracurricular activities. In Hiroshima, the Shansi Fellow works with three different partners. The primary host is the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), which works to support sustainable development and conflict mitigation. ANT-Hiroshima and Green Legacy are nongovernmental organizations that share Hiroshima’s story and message of peace through educational programs.

J.F. Oberlin University

After completing her first semester of teaching, AVA PRINCE '18 began her language training in Sapporo, Hokkaido. She enjoyed the region’s famed soft serve and scenery, as well as leveled up her Japanese competency both in class and through everyday conversations with her Japanese roommates. Since her arrival in Japan in April 2021, Ava has filled her time in Machida with new adventures and domestic travel. She has been on spectacular hikes, visited outdoor sculpture parks, eaten fantastic food, and visited temple and shrine complexes on trips to Okutama, Hakone, Kamikochi, and Chiba with her co-fellows. In Machida, Ava has enjoyed exploring the surrounding neighborhoods, parks, and shopping districts by bike. In the coming months, Ava hopes to build her language competency, foster her relationships in Machida, explore more of Tokyo’s famed art museums, and hopefully visit other sites and countries.

In her second year at J.F. Oberlin University, SARA CHANG '19 was able to return to her site despite the pandemic. She taught online for her remaining two semesters, focusing on games and fun during some not so fun times. She was able to travel all over Japan, including to Akita, where she learned how to snowboard, and Kyushu, where she and co-fellow Emily Eisenstein '19 were able to go on amazing hikes and bathe in incredible onsens. Once junior fellow Ava Prince '18 arrived, all of them took a trip to Kamikochi, where they saw incredible alpine mountains and had a small run in with a bear. Overall, Sara looks back on her time with Shansi with extreme fondness and gratitude.



Sara Chang and Ava Prince hiking the Kintoki trail to see Mt. Fuji

Hiroshima

In the first year of their fellowship in Hiroshima, LÉO ANDERSON '20 focused on supporting UNITAR’s shift from in-person to online programming in a variety of ways, from building customer service chatbots to writing communications materials and translating texts as part of recruitment efforts for upcoming training cycles. Due to the pandemic and the condition of their health, Léo will be continuing to work remotely from Tokyo for the time being. Outside of work, they spent their time reading, baking, gardening, and exploring new shops around their neighborhood. If the circumstances allow for it, Léo hopes to be able to travel and see more of Japan in the near future.

INDEPENDENT FELLOWSHIP

Oberlin Shansi’s new Independent Fellowship allows graduating seniors and recent alumni to design their own two-year experience with an NGO, social enterprise, or educational institution. This allows highly motivated applicants the chance to propose innovative projects and partnerships in regions and sectors outside of Shansi’s typical purview.

SHENG KAO '20 developed an Independent Fellowship project working with New Bloom, an online magazine in Taiwan that provides content and hosts events with radical perspectives on Taiwan and the Asia-Pacific. They do reporting on news, in-depth features and interviews on social movements and timely issues, share podcasts with authors, and host in-person events in Taipei.

In addition to her work at New Bloom, Sheng has been able to spend a lot of time focusing on poetry writing. She recalls "I'm grateful to have learned so much from my time in Taiwan already, and my writing is now able to engage with aspects of place and identity that I didn't have access to before." She joined with friends in Taipei to start a creative writing workshop intensive, where they generated work, intensely edited existing work, and critiqued and workshopped each other's pieces, often across genres and forms. Excerpts of the pieces they worked on are hosted on <https://www.digitallandscapes.xyz/>.



Sheng Kao cycling by the Tamsui river near historic Dadaocheng District

Toward a More Inclusive Shansi

On June 7th, 2020 at an online Town Hall for our alumni and supporters, Gavin and I publicly discussed our goal of fostering a more inclusive Oberlin Shansi. We noted that the "democratization of international opportunities" was among our core values that were reinforced during the turbulent early months of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our conversations around equity and inclusion in 2020 were both practical and aspirational. As Fellows evacuated, pressing questions emerged. What if a Fellow did not have a safe place to stay in their home country? What if they did not have support of biological or chosen family networks upon reentry? What if non-US citizens were unable to return to their home country at all? During a time of uncertainty and disruption, it was our duty to ensure that evacuation procedures extended beyond the Fellows' arrival to their home soil.

After working with each Fellow on a reentry plan (which ensured that we provided an option for long-term housing, continued financial support, and ways to continue their Fellowship work remotely), we continued to grapple with the limitations of international exchange programs writ large. We believe that international and intercultural exchanges should be universal opportunities, regardless of a participant's race, class, gender identity or expression, sexuality, caste, creed, or disability. The pandemic reinforced the fact that some Fellows face compounding challenges due to social factors outside of their control.

Even before the pandemic, we were working toward a more equitable Shansi. In 2019, the Shansi Fellowship was, to our knowledge, the only US-based international fellowship that

hosted orientation panels and mentorship opportunities for LGBTQ+ and BIPOC Fellows. We partnered with the Multicultural Resource Center to cultivate inclusive recruitment and made application support more comprehensive to ensure that all prospective candidates could seek coaching throughout the process. Furthermore, we maintained transparency with our partner organizations when discussing policies relating to discrimination and harassment.

We understand that robust, inclusive Fellow support requires more than just time, labor, and expertise; it also requires resources. In 2021, we launched the Fellow Support Fund, in part to provide opportunities for Fellows affected by the pandemic to extend their Fellowships or to travel to Asia independently. However, the long term objective for this fund is to provide expanded coverage for mental health and grants for low-income Fellows as they seek professional opportunities in Asia and launch the next stages of their careers post-Fellowship.

Our mission is to join worlds between individuals, institutions, and communities in Asia and North America. However, this mission does not exist in a vacuum. Meaningful international exchange requires dialogue about critical issues, including institutional racism, gender-based discrimination, LGBTQ+ rights, and systematic inequality. Shansi is still evolving. We will continue to reflect deeply on our work and make actionable steps to ensure that our programs are, by design, for everyone.

- Reflections by Shansi Deputy Director Ted Samuel

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Mary Anne Hardy, *In Memory of Aaron Brown '76*
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2021 Fellows after an escape room at orientation. Pictured are: Top Row: Samantha Perez, Reet Goraya, Luci Ostheimer, Leina Fieleke, Jess Wilber, and Ted Samuel; Bottom Row: Elaine Wu, Corrie Purcell, and Jasmine Mitchell

THE 2021 FELLOWS

LEINA FIELEKE '21; East Asian Studies, Psychology, and Art History; *J.F. Oberlin University, Machida, Japan*

REET GORAYA '21, Biology, *Keystone Foundation, Kotagiri, India*

JASMINE MITCHELL '21, East Asian Studies, *J.F. Oberlin University, Machida, Japan*

LUCI OSTHEIMER '21, Cinema Studies, *Syiah Kuala University, Banda Aceh, Indonesia*

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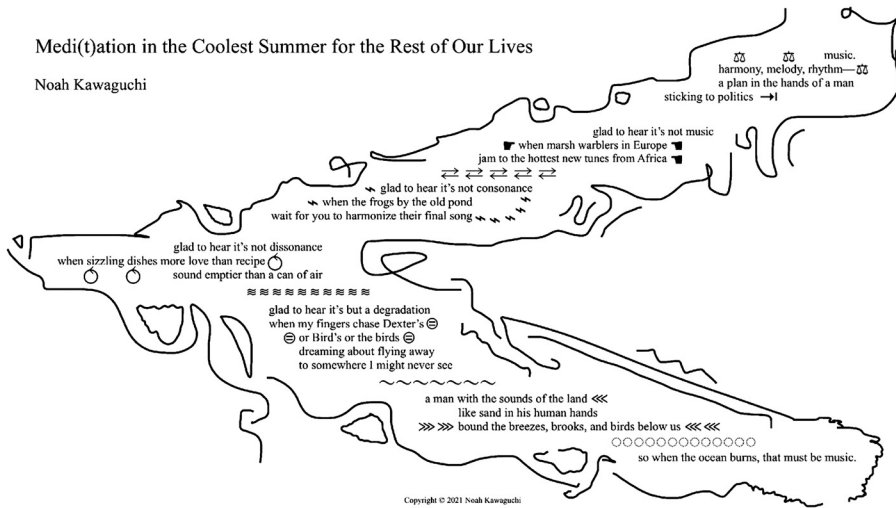
ELAINE WU '21, East Asian Studies and Sociology, *Shanxi Agricultural University, Taigu, China*

Back Cover: Comic by Fellow Jennifer Lin depicting aspects of her fellowship experience.

AAPI EXPERIENCE GRANT

The rise of anti-Asian hate following the Covid-19 pandemic inspired the Shansi team to launch the AAPI Experience Grant program. Through this grant, Shansi supports academic, creative, and community-led projects to highlight Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander voices and activism in North America.

Shansi collaborated with Oberlin College faculty, staff, and Asian diaspora student groups in designing and administering this program.



A visual map of one of Noah Kawaguchi's compositions, "Meditation in the Coolest Summer for the Rest of Our Lives," using tone color to illustrate the use of the shakuhachi within the piece.

The inaugural AAPI Experience Grant winners were Noah Kawaguchi '22 and Zihan Zhang '23.

Zihan produced a comic titled "One Day in her Life" which represented shared experiences of members of the Asian diaspora since 2020. As part of the project, Zihan integrated her study of diaspora literature and graphic novels with personal narratives of anti-Asian hate and discrimination.

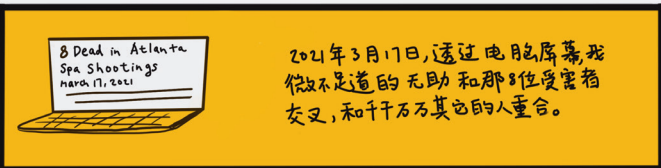
Noah explored non-Eurocentric processes of composing Japanese-American music through his project "Honkyoku, Horiuchi, and Beyond." He composed three pieces and wrote a paper based on research as well as personal reflections. Noah used this project to discuss composing Japanese-American music in historically significant ways.

To view their full projects through their presentation, please go to: <https://www.shansi.org/news-blog/art-amp-asian-diaspora-experiences>



Imagination: I attack them with a flying kick,

Reality: Did I hear it right? Maybe they were not talking to me... Am I making a big deal out of it? Wait why am I defending them? I shouldn't be thinking about it, but I can't do anything before thinking it through... Maybe I should trust my intuition.



On March 17th, 2021, through the cold computer screen, I felt that my insignificant helplessness crossed with those of the 8 victims, and overlapped with those of thousands more people.

Two panels from Zihan Zhang's comic with the accompanying translations.



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