



**Saving the Rainforest of Ethics:  
Society, Urgency, and the Study of Asia\***  
by

William R. LaFleur  
*Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies  
University of Pennsylvania*

*Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 7 (2000): 169–181

*Copyright Notice*

Digital copies of this work may be made and distributed provided no charge is made and no alteration is made to the content. Reproduction in any other format with the exception of a single copy for private study requires the written permission of the author. All enquiries to [jbe-general@jbe.la.psu.edu](mailto:jbe-general@jbe.la.psu.edu).

I am deeply grateful for your invitation to share some thoughts with you in the context of your meeting. When initially contacted concerning this, it was suggested that I might do a talk that included some narration of my “personal odyssey” as an Asian Studies scholar and teacher. When preparing this, I saw underlined on my notes on that phone conversation the words “personal odyssey okay.” Perhaps, however, to persons beginning to realize that, given their age, they are now numbered among the “senior” persons in our discipline, any suggestion that they indulge in a bit of autobiographical reflection should be issued only with caution. In truth, I had never before been given such a *carte blanche* to be autobiographical, and I should probably be worried about the amazing alacrity with which I accepted it. I will—with an unusual degree of pleasure then—accept this opportunity and, at the same time, promise to try to include here as much intellectual content and as little reminiscential self-indulgence as I can manage. I will assume too that this *as an assignment* will help you tolerate what may otherwise come across as bibliographical narcissism—that is, far more references here to my own writings than to the innumerable works of others from whom I have benefited over the decades. I trust too that my somewhat enigmatic title will become more clear as we proceed.

The very fact that this event is shared with Anthony Yu, whose keynote address we all so appreciated last evening, provides a good starting point,

since I was among the graduate students at the University of Chicago when he had just begun to teach there. And one of the memorable events of that time was a reading course that I did with him then. With his help, I struggled to get a grasp on some of the verses in the *Kaifûsô*, a poetry collection of eighth-century Japan. These were poems written by Japanese, but in Chinese, or, as I learned from Anthony, in some instances in what the writers *took to be* Chinese. Sometimes, however, my mentor in that course, whom I knew to write and publish his own poetry in Chinese, would read one of these Japanese efforts in classical Chinese and declare “Not bad!”—a compliment that should have pleased the ears of the Nara period poets of Yamato.

In those days at Chicago, 1968–1971, my primary study was of Japanese Buddhism, but I did this, as my reading course with Anthony suggests, with deep interests in literature and aesthetics. Historians of religion during those marvelous days in Chicago could have strong ancillary interests, and mine were in medieval Japanese poetry, especially that written by Buddhists. My second book, *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts of Medieval Japan* (California, 1983), was my way of showing my deep interest in questions of comparative literary aesthetics. Even today I count as one of my finest feats at Chicago the putting together of the team of the primary readers of my dissertation, a truly extraordinary set. They were Joseph M. Kitagawa, Mircea Eliade, and Anthony Yu—a trinity, I suggest, which in itself constituted something of an “Asian Network” *in nuce*.

Yet there was within me another growing interest, but one of which I was less consciously aware at the time. It lay in the domain of ethics—especially in ways in which the materials from East Asia might provide perspectives and action programs not usually or easily surfacing in the West. It is, of course, true that I worked then on the poetry of Saigyô, a Buddhist monk. Yet I was very interested in questions of comparative ethics and especially in how seemingly “obscure” or “alien” Buddhist materials might be brought to the surface and shown to have value. As an Asianist, I was, I think, already then deeply committed to what Paul Ricoeur called “the hermeneutics of recovery.” Perhaps because I had lived in Japan for a few years prior to my Chicago days, I had already then been convinced that there were things that the West might learn from Asian texts and experiences. But first those things had to be “recovered” through linguistic, historical, and other modes of study. And that, Asianists know, is hardly a finished project even today.

Common in those days (and given expression even today to a surprising degree) was the assumption that East Asian Buddhism, admirable in terms of its meditation practices and metaphysical formulations, had next to

nothing to say to the West in the domain of morality and ethics. I *never* shared that view. And I suppose it was that which not only drew me to the poetry of the twelfth-century Japanese poet Saigyô, but convinced me to try to find out exactly what in his “nature poetry” was interesting, important, and relevant. What I discovered was that he wrote not only verse that celebrated natural forms, but did so showing the influence on himself of a rich lode of Buddhist writing and debate—even under imperial sponsorship—precisely on the topic of how we should conceive of the natural world. It was no coincidence, then, that my first publication on this poet, one that appeared in *History of Religions*, was titled “Saigyô and the Buddhist Value of Nature.” What fascinated me was the amount of time and energy that people in that period of Asian history had devoted to trying to explain in textual and intellectual terms why they were convinced that trees and plants, not just humans, have Buddha-nature.

Those, of course, were days when advanced American military technology was being used for the napalming of trees and plants in Southeast Asia. They were also days when there was a gathering concern for ecological issues—ethical ones if there ever were such. And when just a week ago I realized that we were celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of Earth Day, I could not help but recognize that it was a concern to bring forward at least one Asian perspective, a Buddhist one, on nature that led me to be working on that kind of dissertation topic thirty years ago in Chicago. Taking that approach, however, was not without cost. Much of my education had been in literature, and to this day I delight in what might be called the “pure form” of a truly fine poem—and in works of criticism that explicate such things. An M.A. that I did in Comparative Literature at Michigan was in the heyday of New Criticism. But to have only gone only that far with Saigyô was impossible for me during my Chicago days—even if the price to be paid for such was that of going against the grain of the times. Those days were—it is worth recalling—ones in which Asianists in the West were beginning to delight in what they might discover by way of formalist approaches and were somewhat belated adopters of the mode of New Criticism—at a point, in fact, when New Criticism was elsewhere going out of style.

My interest in comparative ethics and in the question of what in East Asia might prove instructive to the West was intensified by a somewhat fortuitous event in 1974–1975, a year that I spent in Kyoto doing work on medieval Japan. My private walks on the eastern hills of that city took me through the multiple Buddhist temple cemeteries there, and my curiosity was aroused concerning the growing number of Jizô-related sites on those hills. These sites, I realized, were designed to be part of how persons who

had had abortions were using ritual to deal with the moral quandary that they faced. The immediate context for my spiked interest is important. My position in those days was as a junior member of Princeton's Department of Religion and no one there then could (or would wish to) avoid the nearly daily discussions of current ethical matters that centered around the interests and research of the late Paul Ramsey, my respected senior colleague. Ramsey's positions on ethical questions were often very controversial, but his reasoning was rigorous, and he was gracious even to those with whom he deeply disagreed. Just before I left for a year in Kyoto, he had, in his own way, said, "Bill, while you are in Japan, why don't you find out how those Buddhists over there deal with the problem of abortion?" So while there I certainly did ask people. But also on my walks on the hillsides of Kyoto I realized that I was seeing in stone a large part of the way in which Japan's Buddhists were trying to cope with the moral dilemma of abortion. A large part of the "answer" to Ramsey's question lay, I came to see, in that unexpected context. Although what started there required time, research for development, and a lot of further reflection before taking shape in an essay in *Philosophy East and West* and then my book, *Liquid Life: Abortion and Buddhism in Japan* (Princeton 1992), it had been during 1974–1975 that I realized that my interest both in comparative ethics and in what Asian contexts could provide in terms of perspective not known in the West was a keen one.

This is to say that I became fascinated with the fact that in Japan there had been discovered or devised a way of keeping abortion legal and readily available on one hand, but, on the other, of retaining a sense that a fetus is at least life in some limited sense. And this meant that for many persons, even when the route of abortion is chosen, some act of contrition and emotional closure in the context of religion seems important. What interested me especially was that Japan's Buddhists seemed to have avoided the ongoing polarization seen in North America, that between proponents of reproductive choice and those insisting on the right to life. Japan's Buddhists had, I realized, fashioned a way of thinking about the fetus that cast it neither in the immovable state of a "baby," nor in an emotionally dismissive one that referred only to "an unwanted pregnancy." Something *other than* the two positions in the conceptual and political deadlock into which Americans' debates on this question degenerated seemed—and to me continues to seem—to be something very positive offered by the materials from Japan.

I have been subsequently pleased to see that researchers working in Chinese and Korean contexts have been, perhaps partially because stimulated by my work, able to show counterparts to the Japanese *mizuko* rites for

fetuses. The differences, of course, are there—such as, for instance, what seems to be more of a Taoist than a Buddhist frame of reference for rituals in Taiwanese contexts. And it has gratified me to read certain Catholic and Protestant ethicists pointing to instructive value in the Japanese “middle way” approach on the matter of abortion. “Learning From the Japanese” is the title of an essay by an ethicist at an American Jesuit university, for instance (Gary L. Chamberlain in *America*, Sept. 17, 1994, pp. 14–16). And more recently Kenyon College’s Playwright in Residence, Wendy McCloud, stimulated, she writes, by what I had to say on this, wrote “The Water Children,” a fascinating play, one I recently saw performed, that dramatizes how an approach, that of Japan’s Buddhists, may present an alternative to the usual pitched-battle positions in the American abortion debate.

It is seeing the trajectory of these things that leads me to want to refer to the Asian traditions we study as a resource for our own Western societies. Of course, to a certain extent we study Asia, its arts, its history, and its traditions of thought because these things are *there*—like Mt. Everest and the planet Jupiter. Such studies have intrinsic value. But I see no reason not to explore an additional and increasingly needed benefit. These Asian traditions, I hold, have within themselves things that can prove to be potential resources for Western societies to use, as appropriate, in trying to cope not only with the particular ethical and moral dilemmas faced today, but— even more importantly—those likely to be faced in the future. The point is that these are *human* resources, things generated from within Asia, but in no way limited to appreciation and application there.

This is why I feel justified in seeing an analogy here between this benefit of our studies and our sense that the preservation of tropical rainforests is eminently wise. We today recognize such forests as valuable not only because of their monumental contribution to the atmospheric well-being of our planet, but also because within these forests lie irreplaceable botanical resources, ones that have still unknown pharmaceutical applications for health and healing. By this analogy, I mean to say that what the rainforests provide in terms of permitting us to cope in certain physical and medical ways is what the non-Western traditions are demonstrating in terms of perspectives and approaches in them that we might profitably apply to our present and emerging ethical dilemmas. Of course, as a humanist, I deplore the crass utilitarianism that would hold that you do not bother studying something unless and until its usefulness is already proven. Yet at the same time, I feel that we should not hesitate to suggest to our colleagues and our larger societies that *one* of the reasons for studying Asia lies in those things there that may be extensively instructive

to ourselves and those who come after us.

I hold, in addition, that the study of Asia has great potential to help us look under and recognize the contingency rather than the necessity of some of the assumptions in Western civilization generally and contemporary American society more specifically. Far too often we take the Euro-American way as proven to be the better or even the best way, when, as a matter of fact, it is usually the one to which we—even those of us in the academy—are simply most accustomed. Because we do what we do in an academy so deeply shaped, not only for good but also for ill, by Western thought and habits, we are obliged, I suggest, to monitor and check the impulses within ourselves—and built into our methodologies—to use the disciplines fashioned in the West as the *tools* for study and the materials we have from Asia as, in contrast, no more than the *objects* of our studies.

The problem with this approach is that it is predisposed, perhaps even predestined, to reaffirm the value of the methodologies—and the West, which is their matrix—and, by contrast, subject that which we analyze—that is, the Asian “object” of study—to the point where what might have been of value within the latter has been automatically dismissed. This is a problem that even today our studies have tended to skirt rather than face head on. My sense of the need to rectify this out-of-date and unjust imbalance was heightened during much of the 1980s and 1990s, a period during which *Ideologiekritik* was in fashion—perhaps especially among Western students of Japan. The method surely yields its own results. Yet, when wielded as a tool to show that the philosophies, religions, social formulations, and literatures of the non-West were *nothing more than* “fronts” for the exercise of political or social power, the critique of ideology as a method is pre-designed to wipe away whatever might be discovered as items of value in the non-West and its practices. That is, we then have become so entranced by what Ricoeur called “the hermeneutics of suspicion” that we not only neglect, but become suspicious of what in our disciplines had been the important role of “the hermeneutics of recovery.” Although they have their proper role, the operations of suspicion, I hold, should not overwhelm those of recovery. And this is especially so because our studies of Asia have not yet, in spite of significant exceptions, been allowed to enter into conversation with the methodology of the West on the basis of real parity. Years ago, it was with the intent of affirming the need to provide within the West the intellectual space for such parity that I edited and helped usher into print—and garner subsequent wide attention—Masao Abe’s *Zen and Western Thought* (Macmillan/University of Hawaii Press, 1985). The ways in which scholars such as Christopher Ives and Steven Heine have not only extended but also further refined and corrected that process have been very important.

Asia, of course, does not present the so-called West with anything like a univocal and internally consistent alternative point of view. The cultural and intellectual diversity of such a large portion of human experience makes that impossible. This means that to some extent we are forced, at least when making exploratory and critical points based from within that richness, to do some selection. It also means that we must recognize the nature of the differences, even conflicts, within the Asian world.

Allow me to give an example. In my book on abortion in Japan, I explained what I saw as a real contest of viewpoints between Shinto and Buddhism that emerged with clarity, even considerable tension, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The focal point of this difference was on the question of how religious values might be harnessed to campaigns for demographic promotion—that is, efforts to get people to have as many children as possible. The Neo-Shintoists of that period envisioned the Japanese gods as wanting the Japanese people to be as fecund as possible—whereas the Buddhists, maintaining what was, I think, their traditional stance—saw no specifically *religious* value in the making of progeny, even in the making of more baby Buddhists!

At that time I coined a word—one intentionally *unappealing* even in the way the tongue resists its articulation—“fecundism” to refer to what I meant. By this I wanted to specify a pattern found in probably the majority of the world’s religions. Fecundist programs, understandable in epochs when our world was a much less crowded place, portrayed the god or gods as being the supporters of maximal human reproduction. Quantity of progeny was linked to quality of religious life—often especially for women. The Jewish and Christian worlds know this best through what Genesis provides as a divine command to “be fruitful and multiply.” Put crudely, it invokes a mental picture of the god or gods standing around the marriage-bed as reproductive cheerleaders. “Go to it,” they are saying, “and I will be there to make your descendants as many as the sands along the shores of the Sea of Galilee—or the Rhine, the Ganges, the Yellow, or Kamo rivers!” I found it interesting and potentially important, however, that in Buddhism (and, according to Jerome Bauer of Washington University, in Jainism as well) being fecund never seemed to be a very important part of how the *religious* vocation was conceived. I do not wish to suggest that fertility figures and symbols never made their way into the lives and representations of Buddhists. Yet they were for the most part kept at arm’s length, allowed to exist in the ancillary religious systems (such as Shinto in Japan or popular religion in China), but not given anything like a prominent place in the major texts and doctrinal systems within Buddhism. Throughout most of its history, Buddhism has received a fair amount of criticism—from

Confucians, from Shintoists, and from Christian missionaries—as being too “negative” on many things. The supposed “proof” of that putative negativity, one that shows up early in critiques of Buddhism in Chinese history, was that Buddhists were not sufficiently engaged in encouraging their fellows to be making more of their own kind in large numbers.

I wish to suggest, however, that what through two millennia had been for Buddhists either a “hard sell” or something about which they were tempted to remain quiet—namely a distaste for the agendas of fecundism—may in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have turned into a clear plus. The natural, biologically-programmed human impulse to reproduce does not really need religious encouragement. Do we, I ask, really want our religions to go on being the promoters, either explicit or implicit, of enhanced reproductivity? This is something, originally stimulated by Japanese texts looked at in *Liquid Life*, that I subsequently developed at a conference at Harvard’s Center for the Study of World Religions in 1985.

I note the striking difference between the stance of the Buddhist clergy in most of Asia on the question of contraception—a stance not only of acceptance, but often even of *promotion*—and the continued intransigence of the Vatican on this issue, one re-articulated by the Vatican in the 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. In part to indicate that, given the problem of over-population today, fecundism is morally indefensible, I gave expression to my concern in an essay “Ending Fecundism” and written in the form of an open letter to Pope John II. (Requested by the editor of *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, a summary of that essay appears in the Summer 2000 issue of that journal, and its complete version is on the *Tricycle* web site.) Although already receiving its share of negative reaction, that essay, I suggest, is one attempt to put a perspective found in Asia into some level of interactive analysis and critique. It is an effort to insist on the need to respect parity. During Pope John Paul’s visit to Southeast Asia a few years ago, he reiterated some of the old clichés about negativity in Buddhism. My point here is that careful examination and even criticism should be allowed to move *both* ways. And I think that the domains of ethics and morality in praxis to be eminently worthy places to be exercising this activity and insisting on such mutuality.

I sense that in this connection, Confucianism has shown a commendable ability to bend with the times and with the real needs of our world. Whereas fecundist positions were historically common, sometimes in fact very intense, in the history of that tradition—perhaps especially to enhance a given family’s chance for perpetuity by invoking the will of semi-divine ancestors—we can see today a Confucianism that has responded to the dramatic changes in the infant mortality rate and has become surprisingly



free, at least as I see it, from the older fecundist agendas.

Something else, however, has occupied much of my study during the 1990s, and it too lies in the realm of ethics. I have been spending much time reading in the burgeoning literature in Japanese on that subfield we call “bioethics.” In Japanese, the usual term for this has been *seimei rinri* although more recently the word *baioeshikkusu* has also become common. I found that the Japanese materials are not only voluminous, but also intellectually rich. I got into this topic by becoming aware of the fact that, although abortion is a huge topic of public discussion in the USA, but not in Japan, there is an obverse to this—that is, a topic hotly debated in Japan, but one that we in North America have long assumed to be a settled matter. I refer to the transplantation of vital organs from putative corpses—that is, organs excised from persons described as “brain dead”—and then inserted into other persons in desperate need of new hearts, lungs, livers, and the like. What I discovered is that in Japan, there has been an intense and fascinating public argument over the ethics of doing this—a procedure that in most of the West has been conceived of as an altruistic and worthy act. Being as modern as we are, we have accepted the idea, one with roots in modern utilitarianism, that it would constitute something of a “waste” to carry eminently useful organs with us into the grave. In fact, many of our fellow Americans still resist this idea and show their tacit resistance by *not* signing donor cards, but they do not admit that fact because in our society donation has captured the moral high ground. To admit to non-donation is to represent oneself as at some point lower than at that “high” place. In the United States, it is only among Jews, especially those in the orthodox tradition, that the ethical correctness of cadaveric transplantation has been seriously debated and, by some, rejected. The discussion of this among Jewish bioethicists is fascinating and instructive.

Many Japanese, perhaps even a majority, share this unease about describing transplants from supposed cadavers as an unqualified “good.” They see more complexity in the issue. In fact, one of my surprises was to find that in Japan some of the most cogent arguments against transplanting organs from supposed cadavers come from scientists and well-informed medics—that is, from persons who see no basis for declaring the brain-dead as really dead and have multiple reservations about this kind of technology. Tadao Tomio, a highly-respected immunologist, has, in addition to having written many books, also written a fascinating modern Noh play, *Muyô no i*, one performed in the United States a few years ago, that problematizes the ethics of the transplant.

I must admit that my readings on this have changed my own views. I started this research convinced that we in the West are morally right on this

question and that the reason for studying the Japanese resistance was because it shed light on things that are not only particular, but even (in the less than complimentary sense) *peculiar* in their culture and perspective. In other words, my initial stance was somewhat condescending on this issue. I assumed that many Japanese might have come up with a perspective that, although interesting, was clearly *wrong*. The more I read, however, the more I became convinced that the resisters may be right. And, I need to add, what certain Japanese researchers were saying fifteen years ago about the deep problems in the brain-death definition of death are things now being echoed by some scientists in the West. In February, I took part in an international conference in Havana, Cuba, on coma and death. One of the striking features of that meeting was the fact that, especially among some prominent neuro-physiologists, the notion of brain death is crumbling. And, of course, if that happens, then it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the surgical scalpel that removes a heart for transplant is also that which in fact kills the donor. The doing of transplants from what had been thought to be cadavers becomes all of a sudden not only ethically compromised, but, to the society inured to thinking it as acceptable, a bit of a shock.

I have by my reading confirmed an early hunch. It was that at least one of the historical reasons why it is the Japanese who have been most eager to be very scrupulous in this matter has to do with Japan's own horrendous behavior in the realm of medical research during the Pacific War. There are, I suggest, both long-standing religio-philosophical reasons for a Japanese scrupulosity on this matter and also a national wariness with respect to medical research, one that has roots in the history of the twentieth century.

In this area during their imperialist period, the Japanese were victimizers. The record on that is now voluminous and unambiguous. There was medical research that made victims of tens of thousands of people during the Japanese occupation of China. Pregnant women were cut open, water was poured over limbs in subfreezing temperatures to test the level of tolerance, whole populations of unsuspecting farmers were injected with plague germs, and the like. As available in English in books such as Sheldon H. Harris's *Factories of Death: Japanese Biological Warfare 1932–45 and the American Coverup* (Routledge, 1994) the evidence of horrible crimes committed in the name of scientific and medical research is extensive. Then too there were the American pilots who, after having been downed over Japan, were vivisected in experiments carried out in Kyushu Imperial University hospital—something that is the subject matter of the widely read novel, *Umi to Dokuyaku*, by Shusaku Endo and translated as *The Sea and Poison*. Although the facts of the degree of Japanese victimization of

others for medical research reasons have been resisted by Japan's rightists, the general public is now aware of how horrendous it was. Books and television programs there about these things have made this clear.

The other side of the picture—that is, how Japanese see themselves as being victimized by wartime medical research—is something of which Americans are not aware. Here the gap between Japanese perceptions and Americans' knowledge is considerable, and, because it enters directly, I think, into the more generalized Japanese apprehension about medical research, we need to recognise it. I do not wish to give the impression that medical experimentation was part of the purpose in using the atomic bomb. We have no evidence to suggest that prior to its use such was part of the planning. But, as is now clear from *Suffering Made Real: American Science and the Survivors at Hiroshima* (Chicago, 1994), a very important book by M. Susan Lindee, the manner and degree to which American scientists were intent upon collecting and retaining all available evidence of the bodily and genetic effects on persons radiated by that bomb show that Hiroshima and Nagasaki were seen as open laboratories full of data that was simply too valuable to waste. The teams of American medics soon present and collecting radiated body parts in post-war Hiroshima and Nagasaki certainly left with the Japanese the impression that the bomb had been in some sense a *medical* experiment—if not initially, then at least in terms of one of its side “benefits.”

What I find especially important in the Japanese concerns of today is a realization of how easily human ethical sensitivities can be dulled by the language about the “obvious” benefits of certain kinds of medical research. The ongoing rhetoric about every new development as being “positive” is pervasive and difficult to question in American society. Many Japanese, perhaps with good reason, are more skeptical. I found a special degree of interest in the fact that Japanese bioethicists have been reading and praising the insights into technological risks articulated by Hans Jonas, a Jewish student of Heidegger, who escaped the Holocaust and developed very important philosophical insights into these things in the United States. Jonas, I discovered, has been significantly read and valued by Japan's bioethicists, although he has been, in the words of my valued colleague René Fox, “peripheralized” by their Anglo-American counterparts. I developed this in a paper presented in January 2000 at the “International Philosophers' Conference” at the University of Hawaii, one to be published as “Philosophy and Fear: Hans Jonas and the Japanese Debate about the Ethics of Organ Transplantation” in a forthcoming volume now being edited by Roger T. Ames and Marietta T. Stepaniants.

The writing up of the results of my research is very much a work in

progress right now, and I hope it will be a book in the near future. It will be a book that, I expect, will even more than in the past try to deal in detail with ways in which a limited set of materials from one part of Asia could expand our own sense of social and ethical possibilities. Bioethicists in the Anglo-American ambit usually assume that their analyses and perspectives have or should have automatic relevance across the world and that what is “wrong” with those other societies is that they have not yet adequately grasped our values or implemented our techniques. Although the difference between materials from the “early” Buddhism that Damien Keown employs leads him to perspectives often different from those of Japan’s Buddhists, his *Buddhism and Bioethics* (Macmillan, 1995) is in these terms a very important corrective here.

I believe that there is *much* to be learned by becoming more deeply and extensively comparative in this domain. This is to say that we have not only potentially very valuable natural “pharmaceuticals” awaiting our use in the non-Western domain of the rainforest, but also in what we know as Asia the potential for many significant insights into the enterprises of both general ethics and its bioethical subfield. What I wish to encourage is that we explore more of this potential reservoir of insights—perhaps one of the best reasons for studying Asia—by ourselves and with our students.

I want to finish with a note about what I mean by the need, even the urgency, for us as scholars to preserve these resources. My phrase “*saving the rain-forest of ethics*” may suggest something beyond our professional capabilities. Yet we are all forced today to scrutinize not only what might be positive, but what might very well be the “dark side” in the rapid “globalization” of our planet. Either the swift Westernization or the Americanization of the globe is taken by many, especially in the West and in the United States, not only as a given, but also as a good. In that context, I am increasingly finding myself among those inclined to raise objections to both the “givenness” and the “goodness” of such a development. The reasons for concern are multiple, and, although I cannot go into more detail here, I hope that the foregoing provides at least a sketch of why I think this not only important but important for us all as Asianists of the present and of the future. After all, in that totally globalized world that some seem so ready to imagine and bring into being, there will, for all practical purposes, be no “Asia” other than in a flat, geographical sense. And if there were to be no Asia—or, more specifically, no Asia comprised of a variety of differing traditions and societies—there would be much, much less out there against which the Western/American cultural juggernaut could be compared, contrasted, and evaluated. And, I suggest, in that case even the West would have lost something of great value and importance.

\* This paper was originally delivered as a keynote lecture for the Asian Network, A Consortium of Liberal Arts Colleges to Promote Asian Studies in the United States, in Chicago on April 29, 2000. Its style and format reflect that origin, although there have been slight amendments. Comments from the participants in that conference were very helpful for its revision. Its publication in hard copy will be in the *Asian Network Exchange*. An even earlier and rather different version of it was the subject of a lecture at the International University of Florida on January 31, 2000, and I am very grateful for the comments at that time from Steven Heine and his colleagues.