PASSPORT
DUKE UNIVERSITY’S INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE

HOW WOULD YOU REACT TO WHITENESS?

SWEPT AWAY BY THE KOREAN WAVE

FOLLOW THE WAY OF THE KAMI

CHOCOLATE = LIFE

Volume 13 Spring 2011
Despite the unfortunate events and tragic experiences that have made their stamp on Uganda, one cannot fail to notice the enthusiasm and joy that each individual and community brings to the country. When I went to Uganda in the summer of 2009, after ten years away from my native country, I did not want to dwell on the negativity that most travelers and tourists typically capture in a third world country. Rather, I wanted to focus on the smiles that seemed to bring me a certain sense of comfort and belonging upon my return. From making the way through the jam-packed traffic of Kampala, Uganda’s capital city, to striving up long-winded trails in Mbale, the rural area in which my parents were brought up, my senior year excursion became more than just a simple return to the Motherland—it was a revival of relationships that had for so long been stagnant.

Each day, we are bombarded by media portrayals of an all too seemingly destructive global community. With one shift in plate structure and another change in hierarchy, minor disruptions soon translate into entire nations left in turmoil. With earthquakes, tsunamis, and democratic protests familiarizing the New Year in only four months, snow storms and rain falls soon became the norm in 2011. What we fail to realize is that the world does not only revolve around these catastrophes. Indeed, tragedy breeds sorrow, heartache, and suffering, but not all reality succumbs to the uniquely Shakespearean series of unfortunate events.

Delve deep into the heartland of the Mayan countryside and see for yourself the beauty of the landscape. Better yet, savor the sweet details of Christian’s chocolate truffles while trekking through Paris and London. Make a stop in austere Russia, and then take a jump over the Mediterranean and into rural Kenya to rediscover a pristine population before making your way past the Indian Ocean and into South Asia for a dazzling look into dance, rivers, and popular culture. Get a feel for Japanese Shinto before marking your cosmopolitan trail back to the Americas. While you’re at it, grab a handful of fried grasshoppers or even take a stab at some tenderized horse. Let the thirteenth edition of Passport be your escape from the discouraging promises of current events and into grand revelations of places unwritten, with a special salute from our graduating seniors, Natalie and Sunmin.

Joan Nambuba
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Watching and Waiting

by Alice Yen

Two faces of India pass by my train window, bouncing along with the rhythmic bumps of wheels hitting the track. India is a country of extremes, where the gaps of inequality punch you in the face and then some. Poverty-stricken slums filled with starving children coexist beside extravagant tourist resorts offering unlimited samosas and chapati. With the sunrise reflecting off the glass, gigantic palaces and opulent architecture whiz by into the distance, giving solid proof to India’s deep-seated history. Nearby, an elderly mud-splattered woman bends down, scavenging through the trash-ridden bottles littering the ground. It is in moments like these that I feel I am a foreigner; an outsider watching in.

Even for an outsider, there was a definite charm to India amongst the dust-filled air and honking mopeds. Its vibrant culture and welcoming people were unforgettable. Seeing elephants, camels, and cows sauntering through the streets was commonplace, and playing cricket until the sun set was typical. My tongue will be forever marked by India’s platter of irreplaceable spices, and my know-how for Indian showering and rickshaw-hailing has improved tremendously.

Not everything that I saw in India was so quixotic. During my stay, I worked with a community NGO that investigated healthcare in rural regions. As I conducted fieldwork, I came across a young woman who recently gave birth to a stillborn child. She had used a traditional birth attendant, a village dai. Having no equipment or resources and not having the accessibility to go to the nearest health facility, the village dai resorted to using a rusted crop-cutter to cut her umbilical cord. Such stories were not uncommon in my village and throughout rural India, for access to quality healthcare is minimal. As a consequence, many villagers have no choice but to live and cope with conditions that are otherwise unacceptable.

I noticed an old man in the village who stood out, as he spent every day sitting in the middle of the marketplace, watching and waiting. I was told he was a sixty-five year old Rajput, a member of one of the land-holding clans, who lived alone next to the village flourmill. Always wearing the same dust-battered tunic, he used to be an iron welder in the village but since growing old, he now spends every day alone. Day after day in the first week of my stay, I passed by him, wondering what it was he saw and what it was he was waiting for.

After my first few days in the village, I decided to approach the man who I had passed by so many times, offering to have a cup of chai and a conversation at the local shop next door. I sat with him, learning about his life story and the vast knowledge of village history he held. As we spoke, we watched as the day passed by, and it was then that I realized what he was waiting for: a transformation of the village for the better. This transformation will not occur overnight, but my efforts have brought it closer to fruition. Through my work with this community, I have moved beyond watching and waiting; actively working toward change has made me part of the community. It was in these moments that I began to feel less like an outsider. I felt at home.
Downward it plunged. One droplet of water. The future of a nation.

Long ago, the young earth was featureless and pliable, like floating oil, as it drifted freely through the heavens. However, the gods of the Seven Divine Generations were not content. They commanded the youngest deities—Izanagi (“Male who invites”) and Izanami (“Female who invites”)—to mold the earth into its proper form. Thus, with a heavenly jeweled spear, the sibling-gods stirred the ocean until the water curdled. Withdrawing the spear into the heavens, they shook loose a single droplet of brine. Into the coalescing sea below it fell, and where it landed, an island sprouted.

This tale is the creation myth of Shinto (神道) as written in the Kojiki, the first compilation of Shinto mythology. The droplet of brine became Onogoro, the first island and sacred home of Izanagi and Izanami. From Onogoro, they would conceive ten island-children (two flawed children, who were abandoned, and the eight islands of the Japanese archipelago) and other deities, or kami. Izanami died giving birth to the Fire God (ouch!), but other kami were born from Izanagi’s disastrous attempt to visit Izanami in Yomi, the land of the dead, and his consequent purification rituals. Among these deities were Susano-o the Storm God, who would rule over earth, Tsukuyomi the Moon God, and Amaterasu the Sun Goddess and ruler of heaven. Ultimately, these kami and many others spread throughout the islands of Japan, and kami-worship became known as Shinto (“way of the kami”).

So just what is a kami? Unfortunately, this deceptively simple question has no straightforward answer. They are alternatively divine beings or the spiritual essence contained within any object, plant, or animal. Kami are represented by human-like beings, animals, natural formations, or even abstract natural forces, and they often inhabit a sacred space, the entrance to which is generally demarcated by a distinctive gate called a torii (see next page).

Many of the earliest writings on Shinto refer to the “eight million kami” of Japan, metaphorically representing an uncountable multitude, amid the countless kami include such diverse entities as the wind, kitsune (foxes), Mt. Fuji (pictured above), and even a small waterfall on a lonely island of Japan’s Inland Sea. Until the end of World War II, the emperors of Japan were considered living kami, and all soldiers who died while actively serving Japan are enshrined as kami at Yaku-suni. In short, a kami is anything that inspires awe; its presence is felt, not seen.

Today, however, few Japanese seem to feel that kami-inspired awe. Approximately seventy percent of the population disavows belief in any religion, and the rate of belief is even lower among Japanese young adults and teenagers. With the exception of a few popular urban shrines, the jinja (Shinto shrines) are deserted unless they lie on tourist routes. Nearly ninety percent of Shinto priests must take on a full-time job to support themselves, as shrines have now become financial sinkholes that receive no government funding. Shinto has been practiced continuously since the Jōmon period (ca. 4500 B.C. – 250 B.C.), influencing the trajectory of Japanese society and culture even before the nation’s unification, but after more than two millennia of consequence, the significance of the kami is waning.

To understand Shinto’s decline and changing role in modern Japan, the creation myth is a helpful guide. Contained within this story are the two central aspects of Shinto: the martial tradition central to Japanese nationalism and a reverence for nature and its myriad forces. The militaristic face of Shinto has been largely responsible for its rise and fall, but if Shinto is able to remain culturally significant, it will be through a return to its naturalistic origin.
The Heavenly Jeweled Spear – The Martial Tradition and Nationalism

Historically, Shinto has embodied the Japanese martial tradition and Japanese nationalism. Before its unification (as early as 200 A.D.), Japan was dominated by uji (clans), and each uji possessed its own unique kami and rituals. For the uji, a primary function of Shinto was defense, a heavenly spear borne by the chieftain. In fact, ancient shrines also served as storehouses for weapons, and those weapons were often worshiped as symbols of warrior kami.

The Japanese imperial family, which is descended from one of these uji, asserted its control over the other clans by claiming the sun goddess Amaterasu as an ancestor through the mythical first emperor, Jimmu. They further established their primacy by bestowing ranks of nobility (kabane) upon the leaders of other clans—implicit in the act of granting a title is the authority to do so. The omi and muraji, the most prestigious ranks among the kabane, were conferred on those descended from Jimmu and the founding kami respectively. Thus, Shinto beliefs were inextricably intertwined with the foundation of the Japanese state.

Closely identified with the emperors, Shinto gradually became a defining characteristic of the Japanese people, who emulated their rulers. This indigenous attribute was tested, however, with the arrival of Chinese Buddhism from Korea in the fifth and sixth centuries. Buddhism offered the tantalizing reward of salvation, nonexistent in the kami tradition. The Buddhist monk and scholar Kūkai declared that the split between Buddhism and Shinto! The Buddhist monk and scholar Kūkai declared that the split between Buddhism and Shinto! The Buddhist monk and scholar Kūkai declared that the split between Buddhism and Shinto! The Buddhist monk and scholar Kūkai declared that Buddhism and Shinto! The Buddhist monk and scholar Kūkai declared that Buddhism and Shinto! The Buddhist monk and scholar Kūkai declared that Buddhism and Shinto! The Buddhist monk and scholar Kūkai declared that Buddhism and Shinto! The Buddhist monk and scholar Kūkai declared that Buddhism and Shinto! The Buddhist monk and scholar Kūkai declared that Buddhism and Shinto! The Buddhist monk and scholar Kūkai declared that Buddhism and Shinto! The Buddhist monk and scholar Kūkai declared that

Although Buddhism predominated throughout the multiple shogunates of feudal Japan, the emperor wielded the heavenly spear of Shinto to stir the sentiments of his people in the years following the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Shinto, now intentionally separated from Buddhism, experienced a resurgence with the swelling nationalist pride. State Shinto celebrated the unique
superiority of the Japanese people and justified militaristic expansion of their empire. Japan’s altered trajectory of development culminated in its involvement in World War II, and State Shinto’s practice peaked during the war. After the Japanese surrender, the American victors forcibly compelled the emperor to dismantle the State Shinto and the threat it posed as an expansionistic ideology. On January 1, 1946, Emperor Shōwa (Hiroyoshi) repudiated his status as a kami. Post-war Shinto was stripped of its politicalization, and this particular incarnation persisted today. The heavenly spear was laid down for the final time.

Remolding Shinto without the Spear

Deprived of its nationalistic aspect, Shinto experienced a significant decrease in popularity throughout Japan. Initially a strong reaction against Shinto’s militaristic aspect, the continued decline indicates the difficulty of incorporating the kami into the modern world. When asked by Dr. Simon Partner, a Duke University professor of Japanese history, how to get “close to Shinto,” one Shinto priest-in-training recommended “growing life,” and for that reason he spends most of his days working the land. However, with their fast-paced, urban lifestyle, most Japanese have neither opportunity nor inclination to do so. Surrounded by skyscrapers, concrete, and the demands of work or school, experiences of wonder in the natural world—experiences of kami—are few and far between. Progress has paved over the presence of Japan’s spirit-deities who have permeated life on the isles since time immemorial, and their role in contemporary Japan remains unclear. With the dawn of the modern era, the kami has fallen upon the kami?

Although the kami are not a significant part of everyday life, Shinto occupies an important cultural niche and is far from irrelevant. In fact, Shinto ceremonies, now essentially devoid of spiritual meaning, are still frequently practiced across Japan. For example, individual prayer at a few Shinto shrines remains commonplace. Rather than praying for bountiful crops or the health of the emperor, the supplicant often seeks success in business or academics, and shrines with reputations in such domains can be quite busy, especially before exams. Even as they claim disbelief, adolescents and young adults actually make up a large portion of traffic to Shinto shrines. Shinto priests (kannushi) remain busy as well, conducting traditional weddings, providing ritual purification, and blessing objects with a spiritual essence—nearly anything. In fact, since the 2001 release of Microsoft Windows XP, the priests of Kanda Shrine in Tokyo have blessed countless laptops, cell phones, and other personal electronics. Many Japanese follow the traditions of the “way of the kami” without truly considering the eponymous deities.

Similarly, the many Shinto festivals (matsuri) celebrated throughout Japan each year highlight Shinto’s cultural relevance and the diminished role of the kami in Japanese society. During a festival, the kami of the shrine are ritually transferred into a portable shrine (mikoshi), which is then paraded through the streets. Despite the seemingly central role of the kami in these events, the matsuri today are primarily not expressions of spirituality but opportunities for the Japanese to revel without restraint. For example, the infamous mikoshi of the Kanamara Matsuri, held in Kawasaki, attracts thousands of curious spectators each April due to its unusual shape and bearers: a fifteen-foot-high pink penis carried by transvestites. Combining an ancient focus of Shinto, fertility, with a modern issue, this festival harnesses its popularity to raise money for HIV research. The emphasis of the matsuri is now on the associated traditions rather than the kami.

The transition from kami-worship to cultural tradition and entertainment also occurred for kagura, literally “godly entertainment.” The kagura was originally a shamanic dance performed for Shinto rituals, often in structures designed specifically for the performances (kaguraden). Many of these dances relate stories of the kami, and historically, even involved kami-possession. Today, however, possession rarely occurs on-stage, and the Japanese appreciate kagura more for their entertainment value than for their function in worship. Much as an American family catches a play at the local theater, the Japanese family opts to attend a kagura performance for an evening’s diversion. While in Japan, Dr. Partner watched a kagura not in a kaguraden but in a daycare center. The setting reflected the current attitude toward kagura: they are community celebrations of Japan’s culture, and the religious undercurrents are secondary to the recognition of heritage.

Whereas matsuri and kagura preserve the spiritual aspect of Shinto to some extent, Japanese pop culture has incorporated...
rated aspects of Shinto myths into wholly non-religious works across multiple media. Some of the references to Shinto are shallow, as in the popular manga Naruto’s use of “Amaterasu” and other kami names to identify the abilities of several characters. Others draw more heavily on the essence of Shinto in the development of their stories. In the videogame Okami, whose title literally means “wolf” but is also phonetically identical to “great kami,” the player controls Amaterasu in the form of a white wolf as she seeks to break a demonic curse on the land. Throughout the adventure, Amaterasu navigates a world populated by kami and other creatures from Shinto folklore.

Shinto is also featured prominently in several Japanese anime. The Oscar-winning animator Hayao Miyazaki illustrates a Japanese bathhouse operated by and for the kami in Spirited Away (2001). In Princess Mononoke (1997), he addresses Shinto’s modern role—the relationship between man and nature—through the central clash between the needs of a rapidly industrializing society and a very Shinto respect for the natural world. Miyazaki’s resolution to that conflict reflects an actual reconciliation of sorts in line with Shinto values. By restricting human activity to a few urban centers of industrialization, the Japanese have preserved pristine wilderness elsewhere across Japan. This dichotomy originally existed for pragmatic reasons—much of the Japanese archipelago is too ruggedly mountainous for development, but the natural environment’s commanding presence reinforces a societal reverence for nature stemming from the roots of Shinto belief.

Although they claim no religion, the Japanese still embrace this dimension of their ancestors’ spirituality: veneration of the natural world. When city-dwelling Japanese feel the need to reconnect with their roots, they cannot relax in parks or other public spaces, which are uncommon in Japanese cities. Instead, they visit the Shinto shrines that occasionally interrupt the unending urban backdrop. There, rather than praying, they enjoy a precious moment of tranquility, surrounded by nature... and perhaps a kami or two.

A New Droplet of Water, A New Future

Given the Ring of Fire’s dynamic—and often destructive—history, the profound and continuing impact of forces beyond human control upon Japan’s inhabitants is undeniable. That a healthy respect for all aspects of nature has been a constant feature of Shinto throughout history is no surprise. Even something as small and evanescent as a sakura blossom may spark a sense of wonder in the beholder, an inkling of the kami within. As long as nature remains mysterious, astonishing, or terrifying, it will command reverence. As long as it evokes human awe, the kami will remain. The kami’s role in Japanese culture has waned in importance, but it has not vanished completely.

Though twilight may have descended upon the kami, night does not last forever in the land of the rising sun. The kami are simply awaiting the first drop of dew heralding a new dawn.

References

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“Don’t ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go do that. Because what the world needs is people who’ve come alive”

~Howard Thurman
A Duke friend of mine once made the passing comment: “Life’s too good to be grudged over, eh?” Yes, it is. Especially our lives as undergraduate students. With the rest of our lives unfurling before us, beckoning with throaty promise, what terrifies me most is how easily I can lose sight of life’s possibilities.

I’ve been in Paris for almost a year now. I didn’t come to Paris for the Eiffel tower, French bread, or Bordeaux. I didn’t even come for the luxuriant world of French fashion and perfume, or the whispering promises of romance. I came to Paris to study art. Simple. Sounds black and white, but of course, nothing is ever that straightforward.

The first time I picked up a stubby crayon and began scribbling lopsided stick figures on the corner of a newspaper I had already fallen in love. At age four, I decided that I was an artist—and a serious one at that. Up until the past year, that period of my life marked the apex on the graph of certainty of this love. This was a certainty that I had gradually, and methodically, chipped away at for nearly a decade, that I desperately need to regain.

So in more accurate terms, I really came to Paris for love.

I’m taking this year abroad in an effort to look at myself from a distance, to figure out what it is I really want out of life. Every time I used to say that “I’m double majoring in Visual Art and Comparative Politics,” I would always hear in the back of my mind what I really meant, even if I never completely admitted it to myself: “I’m majoring in art, but my real major is in Political Science... I’ll eventually get my J.D. when I’ve gotten all this ‘wild’ out of my blood.”

In reality, I’d always been inexorably and entirely seduced by the allure of resumé building. I look back at my slew of activities and I see a girl approaching her activities through a set of thickly lensed prestige goggles. I went for that which I deemed would shine most impressively in the eyes of others, unconsciously disregarding what I really wanted to do. The fact of the matter was, I never really slowed down to consider that perhaps I did not yet know what it was that I wanted to do. The Duke student body, so full of promise, ambition and talent, is one of the reasons I chose to come here for school, yet the competitive and unremittingly pre-professional culture at our alma mater nourished the desire to stay ahead and become one of the many. Midway through my second year as an undergraduate, though, I found myself struggling and exhausted, unable to let go of a competition, the prize of which I had never really clearly had a glimpse of in the first place. That’s when I decided to pack my bags and head for the City of Lights.

I have been a Chinese-Americaine étudiante residing in Paris’ tenth arrondissement for nearly two semesters now. Being in Paris has reinvigorated me; I feel as if a dollop of color has been injected into my life. I see almost every day in vivid hues, and it’s giving me courage to pursue my art as something worthy of being a primary life goal. Five minutes away from my apartment is the Canal Saint-Martin, and walking along its cobbled banks, I can see Audrey Tautou’s Amelie skipping her carefully chosen pebbles across its quietly rippling surface. As I walk, I peer across the street into the half-fogged-up window of my favorite New York inspired café-restaurant, that serves what I’m sure is the best carrot cake on this side of the Atlantic. I hop onto the Magenta metro line four towards Porte de Clignacourt to visit the brocantes of Paris’ oldest marché aux puces (flea/antique market), all to collect a handful of story-laden trinkets for a necklace just shouting to be brought into existence. While I’m there, I stop by a small gallery just shouting to be brought into existence. Strands of lilting jazz from the café cabaret across the street wind their way towards us, momentarily pausing our conversation...

Here, an image of an impossibly narrow rope bridge appears suddenly in my mind, a precarious thing strung across some gorge in a mountainous region of China I had once visited—perhaps in youth or perhaps in a dream. I brace myself on that bridge as it sways dangerously with every vented step, each hushed breath. I train my eyes on my toes, each shuffling step taking me across yet another wooden plank: towards an end that I dare not lift my gaze to meet lest I lose my balance and plummet into the unknown. A prickly weight pushes against my shoulder blades with each step I take, yet I brush it beneath the carpet of my subconscious as I focus on the task at hand. Eventually, I pick up speed, walking a bit faster, and faster, and faster yet. I start running and I see the planks beneath me flashing by in blurs... yet something whispers, “stop.” Heart racing, I slow my steps and finally lift my head, following the little puff of white air that has escaped my lips. I feel a sheen of mixed sweat and morning dew on my forehead, cool against the crisp mountain air. I blink and let my gaze slide. Around me is the rich, secret green of the forest, the proud thrust of the mountain peaks, the heart-filling call of an unnamed hawk—the natural beauty overwhelming and unabashed. I place both hands on the rope railings of my one-time adversary and gently sway to the rhythm of the mountain stillness. I temporarily let my eyes fall shut once more and welcome the hot rush of joyous tears as the prickly weight on my back unfurls... I had been running along this suspension bridge with eyes shut for so long that I’d forgotten that I could already fly. That day, I wrote in my sketchbook: “My heart feels so full that it might just burst into a million splendid pieces.”

In Paris, I have experienced time and again that feeling of quiet exhilaration that steels me as I teeter on the threshold of tackling a new project - a natural high that comes from doing what makes me come alive. Here in Paris, I have found my wings. As it turns out, I had been carrying them all along.
Mustafa Nassery is a messenger. A normal, homework-laden intellectual here in America, he carries in his heart the culture of his native country of Afghanistan, a hope for tolerance and acceptance. Mustafa straddles these two worlds with a quiet confidence that makes him instantly likable, but somewhat aloof. Whether stamped on a t-shirt or outlined in a Facebook status, his mission is somehow pronounced. But most often, meek as he is, Mustafa lets his life speak for itself.

However, Mustafa is not just a messenger or a role model to look up to. He is also a college student struggling to find his own place in the world. He is a young man living thousands of miles from home and a devout Muslim in a nation sometimes suspicious of his religion. But for Mustafa, the United States has lived up to its reputation as a true melting pot. “One of the good things about American culture is the mix of other cultures,” he says, “I’ve been trying to find my own identity, trying to find who I am here.” In many ways his life is a study in contradictions.

Despite his time in the United States, Mustafa remains deeply rooted to his hometown of Kabul, where his family still resides. He is applying to American graduate schools for political science, but believes he is unlikely to receive the financial aid he needs in order to study. He has considered taking a job in the States, but with only a few weeks of vacation a year, he would never be able to return home. All things considered, Mustafa knows that he wants to move back to Kabul eventually. “My family is back home and I really want to live with my family long term,” he explains, “and moving them here is just not a possibility in the next ten or twenty years.” Despite his decidedly non-western devotion to family, Mustafa has seen little of them since first journeying to the United States six years ago. In that time he was only been able to return home twice. For travel to the United States, “I am only able to get a single entry, three month visa,” Mustafa explains, “so if I go home, I have to apply for the visa again.”

Applying for a new visa in Afghanistan is a journey in and of itself. Until recently all Afghans seeking American visas had to travel to Islamabad, Pakistan in order to apply.
Now the United States Embassy in Kabul is able to give out visas, but it can take anywhere from three weeks to three months for the travel document to be issued. Twice Mustafa has missed an entire semester of school because his visa was delayed.

Despite his difficulties returning home, Mustafa has used his time in the United States to travel. He studied abroad in Germany for a semester during his junior year, which allowed him to explore Europe. “My program was about the politics and programs of the European Union,” says Mustafa, “which is perfect for my interest in politics and the Foreign Service.” While this type of world travel may not be unusual for many Americans, for the people of Afghanistan, it is nearly unheard of.

For most of his childhood, Mustafa rarely left Kabul. He was always caught in the middle of the wars ravaging Afghanistan’s capital city. As a small child, Mustafa was brought up with stories about the Soviet Invasion and its tribulations. When Mustafa was in second grade, Afghanistan fell into civil war. For the next five years Taliban forces fought against a variety of militias, each backed by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, or Iran. Kabul was almost entirely destroyed, and Mustafa’s family was not immune to the destruction. “A few months after my sister got married, three rockets hit her house. One of the fingers on her right hand was left permanently disabled,” Mustafa remembers. Unfortunately, that would not be Mustafa’s last run-in with violence.

One day Mustafa was at a bakery near his house with his mother and brother when two rockets hit the bakery. Mustafa’s mother and brother were both injured with his mother’s finger was permanently disabled. “It’s kind of strange, the exact same finger was disabled on my mom and sister,” Mustafa remarks, his voice devoid of emotion. But, his family decided to remain in their home in Kabul. “You can’t escape from death, you know?” Mustafa explains. If you went to Pakistan, ‘you wouldn’t have a job there, and your house would get robbed or destroyed. My parents were right, most people who left returned to find their homes destroyed.”

Though the civil war was hard, the years following the Taliban victory in 1996 were good ones. The security situation in Kabul improved dramatically, and everyday tasks like going to school became less of a struggle. For all of the well-documented abuses committed by the Taliban, their government was largely a positive change for Kabul. The peace, however, was short lived. After the United States’ invasion in 2001, life in Kabul became difficult once again. “It’s not a good feeling taking exams and hearing bombs fall around you,” Mustafa said.

Yet, despite these two wars, Mustafa continued to do well academically. He took private English lessons and began attending a very good Turkish school. Since none of the students spoke Turkish, classes were taught in English. From this school, Mustafa learned about Seeds of Peace, the program that led him to the United States for the first time.

During the summer of 2003, Mustafa spent three weeks in Otisfield, Maine at the Seeds of Peace International Camp, a program which aims to “develop the friendships and trust necessary to build a lasting peace” by bringing youths from warring countries together and having them meet face to face. Traditionally limited to bringing only Israeli and Palestinian students together, Mustafa’s group was only the second to include Afghans. For Mustafa, this was not just an enjoyable vacation; it was also a transformative experience. At this camp, Mustafa met another Afghan who was studying in the United States at a private boarding school. She was the one who encouraged Mustafa to apply for the program. Mustafa followed her advice, came to America, and has been here ever since.

At first, Mustafa’s friends in Afghanistan were skeptical of his travels and had their own ideas about the agenda of Seeds of Peace, but Mustafa convinced them that its purpose was good. Similarly, Mustafa has sometimes run into people in America who don’t understand him or his faith. But rather than becoming uptight or pessimistic, Mustafa simply educates them about his background. Even as he tries to find his own way through the world, Mustafa remembers that he serves a higher purpose.

Unfortunately, Mustafa doesn’t have an answer for the situation back home. It is worse than ever. “Suicide bombings never happened until the United States invasion. Before, when you went out you would not see people injured on the street; now, when you leave your house, you are not certain about what is going to happen.” Despite the violence, Mustafa says, “I’m not scared because I’m used to everything. Everything has become normal for me.”
The curtains open and the spotlight focuses on the bharatanatyam dancer, who emerges from the darkness. She is extravagantly adorned in a tailored silk sari and heavy costume jewelry. She walks to the edge of the stage, so that she is closer, but still removed from the audience. Standing in front of a microphone, she begins to explain the key features of bharatanatyam. Standing in one place and without musical accompaniment, she translates into English the lyrics of the song she will dance to in her first act. She demonstrates symbolic hand gestures known as mudras that will accompany the lyrics. The dancer retreats backstage after the synopsis. The orchestra, consisting of a singer, tabla player, and violinist, begins to play and the dancer elegantly reenters the stage. She launches into the performance, augmenting each bodily move with evocative facial expressions. She covers the stage with virtuoso footwork and dexterous hand motions, expending a tremendous amount of physical energy. The audience observes her in awe.

Bharatanatyam is a highly technical, solo South Indian classical dance form primarily practiced in Tamilnadu. It “consists of a repertoire and vocabulary that bifurcates into nritta, abstract rhythmic choreography, and nritya or abhinaya, dramatic dance.” The non-dramatic component requires the dancer to demonstrate various combinations of leg bending, kicking, rotating, and stretching and exemplifies the form’s grounded use of weight. The dramatic component organizes itself around profound lyrics that are traced by articulated fingers, hands, and arms. The product of these two aspects of bharatanatyam is a beautifully crafted art that is pleasing to the eyes, ears, and mind.

While the splendor of the dance has not been contested, there has been controversy over whether bharatanatyam has exhibited a trend towards localization or globalization. For the purposes of this article, localization entails the struggle to reassert the cultural identity of this art form after a history of colonial reform and to resist further foreign influence. Globalization involves the injection of foreign characteristics into the traditional art form. Often though, it is impossible to label a phenomenon as one or the other. As with any art form, the evolution and present state of bharatanatyam reflects a combination of localization and globalization. Labeling the art form as one or the other is an impossibility because bharatanatyam has thrived in an environment that exerts the forces of both.

The very roots of bharatanatyam demonstrate the early interplay between globalization and localization. Sadir was the rudimentary form of bharatanatyam and was practiced by devadasis, women who sang and danced in the courts and temples of South India. In comparison to bharatanatyam, it required less usage of the legs, but incorporated the same upper body movements and dramatic facial expressions. British colonialism in the nineteenth century exerted its foreign influence upon this art form. In describing the dance in their own terms, the British distorted the identity and artistic practices of devadasis by misnaming them as “temple prostitutes.” These false stereotypes amounted to pollution and subsequent alienation of Sadir. This, in one sense, is a globalization effect, as the British destroyed Sadir as a localized cultural component. Their imperialistic practices hindered India’s ability to claim this dance as part of its national identity. These changes brought about by the British were far from ephemeral; they were passed on to the next generation of dancers.

Twentieth century bharatanatyam dancers inherited a legacy of colonial reform and were faced with the challenge of reviving Indian performing arts. Their nationalistic attempts represent a trend toward localization because they sought to revive the original art form of Sadir. However, in their attempts to “renationalize,” they necessarily understood the identity of Indian dance based on their subjectivities, personal skills, and regional affiliations. Subjectivities may include their personal opinions about which aspects of the dance need to be emphasized in this revival process. Personal skills are their experiences in dances of other cultures, such as ballet or jazz. Regional affiliations entail having certain bodily predilections due to practices in a particular region of India, such as carrying baskets on one’s waist. Thus, what came to represent “national identity” was actually a mix of individual backgrounds.
Of these “nationalist” pioneers, Rukmini Devi best demonstrates the impossibility of localizing the art and returning it to its original form. Devi was a global Theosophist who worked on behalf of the transnational worldview of the Theosophical Society throughout her long and distinguished career between 1920 and 1986. She married Englishman George Sydney Arundale, was made President of the All India Federation of Young Theosophists and World Federation of Young Theosophists, and traveled the world for the first 13 years of her grooming within the Society. Rukmini Devi returned to India after worldwide travel in 1935, learned Sadir from traditional male teachers and devadasis, renamed the dance Bharatanatyam, and performed it on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of the Theosophical Society in 1935. It is important to note that she used stage lighting, imported from British stagecraft, and recostumed, restaged, and theatricalized the entire dance. The influence of her formal education in ballet with Anna Pavlova was also clearly incorporated within her personal revival of Sadir. The leg and toe extensions in the air are the most distinctive example of this hybridization. Thus, while the advent of bharatanatyam was premised on its precursor, Sadir, its birth integrated the influence of British production style and ballet dance, both of which are global influences.

Considering its roots, bharatanatyam thus never solely tended towards either localization or globalization. The global thrust of Devi’s dance impedes recuperation of bharatanatyam within the “territorializing framework of Indian nationalism.” In other words, Devi exposed bharatanatyam to global influences from its very birth with her incorporation of ballet and British production styles. Since it inherently possesses characteristics from other cultures, bharatanatyam cannot be classified as “local.” To summarize the simultaneously operating forces of globalization and localization, it would be more accurate to state that Rukmini Devi revived a local art within a global framework.

Therefore, we must reposition bharatanatyam within the double framework of global and local, simultaneously. The roots of bharatanatyam and its evolving forms of expression due to internal pressures all prove that the dance cannot be labeled as one or the other. Rather, contemporary bharatanatyam is a result of a combination of global and local trends. The culturally unique dance now manifests itself as a world form, engaging artists across the United Kingdom, Europe, United States, Canada, Australia, as well as in India, Sri Lanka, Singapore, and Malaysia.

The thorny question of what exactly constitutes local is a point of contention that requires further study in the context of bharatanatyam. At the time of its revival in the 1930s, Sadir was represented by different people in different versions. Since they attempted to imitate the traditional dance form, should we call them all insiders? Or should we call them outsiders because they are representing Sadir in the new name of bharatanatyam? What is authentic tradition? The term ‘local’ is vague and subjective. James Clifford writes about this issue, “Some strategy of localization is inevitable if significantly different ways of life are to be represented. But local in whose terms? How is significant difference politically articulated? Who determines where and when a community draws its lines, names its insiders and outsiders?” This subjectivity is important to the globalization versus localization debate because many may disagree on which historical moves constitute localization. Some argue that any attempt to near the traditional art form is localization, and others may argue that localization is impossible because one can never revive a dance of the past in its original form.

Bharatanatyam will forever oscillate between globalization and localization because of the classic debate between preservation and innovation. The conservative point of view disparages any accommodation of foreign styles, whereas the opposite point of view welcomes innovation as a way for the dance to escape its present stagnation. The latter argues that making the dance more applicable to present day situations and attitudes can prolong its life. Until and unless this longstanding debate is resolved, globalization and localization will forever be opposing, yet coexistent forces. 

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2 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
8 Meduri, "Bharatanatyam," 52.
Flowing gracefully through the heart of metropolitan Shanghai, the Huangpu (or Yellow Bank River) is a majestic 97-kilometer long river that bisects the city into the east and west. Pudong and Puxi, banks. The versatile Huangpu River is the city’s longest and one of the earliest in China to be used by men, reaching an average width of 400 meters and a depth of 9 meters. Known as the “Mother River,” the Huangpu has long been considered the symbol and embodiment of Shanghai, with majestic significance equal to the Thames of London, the Nile of Cairo, and the Seine of Paris. It supplies water to the thirteen million people in the metropolis and is also important for navigation, fishery, tourism and receiving wastewater. The river is also inextricably intertwined with the social and economic life of Shanghai, having nurtured its prosperity and served as a silent eyewitness to the city’s history and development.

If you were to visit Shanghai now, the most common way to explore the Huangpu River is by boat. Tourists can embark on a three and a half hour journey across 60 kilometers of the river, meandering eastward along the golden waterway to downtown Shanghai. Sailing down, you will find yourself immersed in the renowned sights of the Yangpu Bridge shaped like a sleeping dragon, the Nanpu Bridge reminiscent of a rainbow arch, the Bund, and the Oriental Pearl TV Tower. When once a cruise, it is easy to see stark differences in architecture between the east and west banks: the 21st-century cityscape of urban skyscrapers of different foreign architectural designs on the west bank presents an exotic contrast to the colonial constructions and modern high rises on the east bank. An experience of the Huangpu riverfront offers interesting perspectives on both the old and new Shanghai, giving visitors the brief feeling of passing through a corridor of the city’s complex history. The dramatic contrast on both sides of the riverbank appears almost surreal, as if a designer had simply juxtaposed scenes from two different periods of time. Under the rays of the sun, the water glimmers a beautiful color of yellow jade – from which the river derived its name – and beckons to the touch, almost as if it had captured the essence of sunlight itself. At night, the river is awash with color as lights from buildings on the riverbank cast lively reflections on the water surface. Both banks are constantly bustling with people, and the river itself is always crowded with cargo and cruise ships. Occasionally, you can even see fish swimming just underneath the surface and hear them plopping out of the water.

While Shanghai’s skyscrapers and modern lifestyle are often seen as quintessential to China’s recent economic development and industrialization, the city still faces conflict and contradictions. The “Shanghai Fever” of the last decade has almost erased every trace of the city’s agricultural past as a small fishing village. The Chinese government’s attempt to recapture Shanghai’s glorious past as the “Paris of the Orient” in the 1920s and 1940s materialized in the form of a frenzied project of “cosmopolitanism” in the 1990s. Pudong, the east bank of the Huangpu River, was established as a Special Economic Zone in 1993 and is now one of the fastest growing hot spots of urbanization and global enterprise in the world. Living in Shanghai, I witnessed how the “Pearl of the East” TV tower – bearing resemblance to the Eiffel Tower of Paris – and numerous skyscrapers were erected in a few years. Major bridges and tunnels were also built, boosting the city’s economy and linking the old and new Shanghai. These imposing feats of construction serve as testimony to the unbelievable ability of the Chinese to change a city landscape. Rice paddies seemingly turned into asphalt roads, commercial buildings, and residential compounds almost overnight. The once-rural and barren Pudong was transformed into one of the most impressive futuristic landscapes within less than a decade.

A cruise on the Huangpu River will surround you with dazzling sights of urban innovation. However, the river truly does serve as a silent witness privy to the full effects of Shanghai’s rapid and superficially magical transformation. If you sail further down the river, you will be stepping into another world: one that lays bare the reality of industrialization, stripped of all the bright lights and shiny buildings. The scenery is much less picturesque, and the riverbanks do not boast impressive, awe-inspiring feats of architecture. Instead, they are clustered with rows and rows of factories – more than a hundred steel and cotton factories use the Huangpu River as a source of waterpower and a site for waste disposal. The sky in these areas is a perpetual blanket of gray, thickened with the smoke and smoke constantly belched from uncountable factory smokestacks. The river water here no longer glistens and shines with liquid sunshine; it is instead clouded in a murky brown, even black with sewage, covered with greasy slicks of oil. There is no sign of life: no fish in the water and no individuals to be found anywhere near the river, only the occasional cargo ship. The river banks are inundated with rubbish and swamped with the fetid stench of industrial waste mixed with decay.

The Huangpu River has always held an endearing symbolism for the people of China and the citizens of Shanghai. It is the main artery of the city’s heart, nurturing them by pumping the necessary resources to make Shanghai’s economy so successful. Shanghai is dependent on the Huangpu River for water (for agricultural, industrial, and human consumption uses), fishing, transportation, and tourism, including many other aspects of modern life. Without the river, Shanghai would not be anywhere close to being the world class city that it is today. Chinese culture also emanates with reverence for the river, with hundreds of poems written in admiration of its magnificence and importance to the people’s way of life.

Unfortunately, allowing a city to grow while preserving its cultural history and natural beauty is a particular challenge in Shanghai, especially since the country is witnessing unprecedented rates of economic growth. The government is single-mindedly driven to achieve sustained double-digit economic growth and is thus largely unresponsive in taking initiatives to enact environmental laws. Despite national and international recommendations to curb pollution and prevent permanent destruction of the environment, the government still refuses to enact any laws with proper teeth to protect the environment in fear of obstructing industrial progress and economic profits. In fact, the government enforces a heavy hand against any protestors accusing factories of polluting local water sources, and it is common practice for factories to pay “compensation” to pollute. Today, the Huangpu River’s pollution problem...
alone will cost more than $13 billion to alleviate. This exorbitant sum begs a river of questions: When is the indiscriminate polluting of the environment, especially of the rivers that made China what it is today, going to stop? How much is it going to cost to clean up China’s ruthless exploitation of natural resources? Who will speak out to raise awareness and promote advocacy in protection of the environment? If, and when, a Chinese environmental movement does emerge, what would it look like? And perhaps most importantly, what would an environmental movement mean to the Chinese people as the beginning of social and political reform?

Developing greater urbanity and reinforcing social equity via environmental awareness are closely related. They also reflect the Chinese government’s purported interest in making “harmony” a guiding theme for the country’s modernization. These issues are not unique to Shanghai, given the present bill for China’s colossal environmental damages. Although a framework of environmental laws and regulations in China does exist, significant problems persist because environmental protection is often subverted by local protectionism, corruption, and regulatory inefficiencies.

In August 2003, the cargo vessel collision of “Changyang” caused 2,761.5 tons of oil-contaminated waste being dumped into the Huangpu River. The accident occurred around major waterworks serving Shanghai municipality, resulting in an oil slick two hundred meters long and twenty meters wide. It was, and still is, the largest oil spill disaster to occur. The boat held responsible was never charged with damages, and the oil slick was only cleaned up weeks later, after it had already wreaked environmental havoc.

While the government publicly announced that the water was safe to drink again after the cleanup, a local study has revealed five years after the incident that men who drank water from the previously polluted section of the Huangpu River were approximately three times more likely to develop esophageal cancer, suggesting that there are probably many other side effects that remain unaccounted for. The government’s management of the oil spill outraged many citizens and galvanized protests in Shanghai advocating for preservation of the Huangpu River and prevention of further pollution. This grassroots campaign marks the incipient rise of a new social and political movement in China: an environmental movement that aims to influence consumer behavior, business practices, and government policies without directly challenging state power.

Unlike earlier social movements that sought explicit political change, like the Tiananmen Square revolt, the Huangpu River environmental movement spearheaded by scholars and university students aimed to raise public consciousness and solve specific problems. Advocates consciously try to promote gradual political change with practicing active citizen participation, individual opinions, self-responsibility, and rational debate—all quintessential democratic values. Relying on media publicity and international support, the beginning of the Huangpu River environmental movement reflects a larger trend within China of using legitimate and peaceful channels to build an organizational base for collective action.

Chinese environmental activists represent a new breed of practical, idealistic, and often well-educated youth who practice self-reliance and independence—both new concepts in China. As such, the environmental movement’s rise is indicative of the expansion of space for political participation and the growing differentiation of multiple groups in Chinese society.

The Huangpu River oil spill was the monumental catalyst that spurred a growing environmental movement in which the public resorts special interest groups and opposes the state’s environmentally unfriendly behaviors. Through protecting the environment, the people were able to fight for their civil rights and effect a push towards greater democracy in the country. Citizens, environmental organizations, and journalists found more democratic space in the “green” realm of politics, influencing the behaviors of the government and special interests by writing articles, opening forums, launching grassroots campaigns, and encouraging environmental education.

Through the Huangpu River campaign, activists appealed to citizens’ personal and cultural attachment to the river as a symbol of Shanghai—both historically and in modern society. In October 2003, the Chinese State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) organized two forums to discuss the environmental implications of the oil spill and state of pollution in the Huangpu River. Even though these forums were highly controversial and opposed by the Chinese government as an attack on their legitimacy and ability to resolve national issues, the publicity that the state opposition received played an important role in tipping the balance in favor of environmental advocates. The Huangpu River campaign demonstrated several strategic attributes that would characterize the emerging Chinese environmental movement. The first notable feature was that environmental groups played an important role in mobilizing public opposition to the government’s response to the catastrophe and raising public awareness about the river’s dire condition of pollution. In December 2003, Friends of Nature, the country’s first legal nonprofit group that was founded in 1994 managed to mobilize 10,000 college students to sign a petition letter demanding that the government take a more active role in protecting the Huangpu River and the Shanghai municipality affected by related pollution problems. In January 2004, more public forums were organized in Shanghai to discuss the economic, social, and ecological impact of pollution on the Huangpu River, focusing on the detrimental effects on water quality and diminished value of the river in fueling industrial growth. These forums highlighted criticisms of the unacceptable pollution levels in the Huangpu River as endangering the health of local residents and destroying the beauty of an important symbol of national identity.

In February, a group of journalists, environmentalists, and researchers conducted a tour along the Huangpu River, carrying out a study on pollution conditions, then developed a photo exhibit accessible to the public. These photos were particularly effective in communicating the need for environmental protection to the masses, many of whom were still illiterate and hence unable to read newspaper articles, or do not have access to media outlets (television stations were still rare at the time among the general Chinese population). The exhibits were tactfully placed in downtown Shanghai to ensure that it received a high volume of spectators daily, and I remember being overwhelmed with images that captured the reality of pollution every day when I took the subway to school.

Within a few days after the release of the photo exhibits, concern over cleaning up the Huangpu River became almost viral in Shanghai and generated prolific publicity nationwide—hundreds of scholarly essays were published on the dangers of river pollution, online forums discussing the issue were created overnight, and the idea of protecting the river became a hot topic among locals engaging in colloquial conversations. The widespread influence of these exhibits was a significant factor in shaping the perspectives of locals towards environmental protectionism and led to the successful mobilization of citizens to advocate for more effective environmental laws.

The second feature of the movement was the organized use of a range of mediums for collective action through public forums, petition letters, study tours, photo exhibits, websites, and...
tual activists engage in to influence political developments in Chinese life has been considered by many scholars as an environmental path to political change. 

Because environmental protection has less political sensitivity, it can more easily lead to social consensus and cooperative agreements. As such, the Chinese have chosen to turn environmental issues into political issues, using environmental protection as a more subtle, but influential, way of approaching democracy. 

From the issues surrounding the Huangpu River, it is evident that environmental pollution and degradation is costly to Chinese economic productivity, damaging to public health, and engenders social unrest. The environment serves as a locus for a broader political discontent in contemporary Chinese society and calls for nationwide political reforms. Thus far, China's own process has brought a unique dynamics and energy to the nature of its environmental challenges, integrating ancient ecological cultures with new technologies. 

This infusion of historical perspectives with modern ideas creates an interplay of economic development and environmental protectionism that demands the consideration of an array of potential outcomes. So what will China's future environmental path look like? The conflict between China's economic growth and environmental protection can no longer be ignored, but it is difficult to achieve both goals harmoniously, especially considering how China wants to double the size of its economy by 2020. 

However, the Chinese environmental movement is still making gradual progress as “green” groups are cropping up throughout China and beginning to make an impact. At present, there are nearly 3,500 environmental groups in China's nascent civil society. However, the movement is still very young: the organizations are small and they do not have much funding (Li 2010). Nevertheless, this environmental movement in 21st century China is one of the most exciting landmarks in the country's course of development, oriented towards reducing the risks from China’s worsening environment, while also bringing more democratic rights to citizens.

Given the changing nature of both China's economy and its evolving political system, assessing Shanghai's environmental future on issues concerning the Huangpu River and its broader implications for China as a whole is no easy task and completely open to speculation. In Shanghai, public attitudes towards the environment are evolving as rapidly as new skyscrapers are rising. The environmental movement represents a transitional moment for China: for the past three decades, the government has passed increasingly strict environmental laws, but the expectation that these regulations would be upheld was almost nonexistent. It remains an open question as to what degree the Chinese government, aware of the possibility of its authority being challenged, will continue to expand the political flexibility afforded to environmental campaigns. In China's history, leaders have often achieved great success at the expense of nature through grand-scale development projects that control and exploit the environment for man's own benefit. But today, greatness may well depend upon straining off this traditional route and developing a new relationship between man and the environment by following the natural flow of the river of democracy instead.

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Hallyu

The Korean Wave

by Jennifer Hong

Korea.

Many ideas spring to mind when I think of Korea: Seoul, tension across the peninsula, bulgogi, karaoke. Though, as a Chinese girl who easily falls prey to foreign influences, I must say that, sadly enough, the first thing I think about when I hear “Korea” is not its politics or economy but rather its society; specifically, the entertainment industry.

Super Junior, TVXQ, Girls’ Generation, Big Bang, Kwon BoA, SHINee, 2PM—the list of prominent singers could go on and on. Korean artists have spread their influence far into Asia and even into the depths of Europe, South America, and the United States. The entertainment industry isn’t limited to just the vocalists though; Korean dramas such as My Girl, Winter Sonata, and Secret Garden are notoriously addictive and are often readapted into various languages to be watched around the world. Korean influence has extended so far that artists from other cultures are commonly charged with plagiarism of famous Korean songs; recently, Ecuadorian artist Andrea Bucaram was charged with plagiarizing boy band MBLAQ’s song “Oh Yeah,” having released a song with nearly the same tune under a similar title. Another Serbian band was charged with re-using SHINee’s song “Lucifer” under the same circumstances. Korean culture is so influential that it has been dubbed hallyu, or the Korean wave, that is slamming the world infectiously.

It’s certainly comforting to hear that I am not the only person interested in watching dramas and listening to music in a language I do not understand. But what exactly makes hallyu so prominent? Perhaps it is the incredible appeal to its fan base: celebrities are almost always multi-talented in singing, dancing, acting, or modeling—and more often than not, good-looking. Perhaps it’s the appeal of the dramas, which are often considered the driving force behind hallyu, capitalizing on the universal irresistibility of a heart-throbbing romance depicting a sweet-yet-forbidden love.

What I believe makes hallyu so widespread, though, is the sheer ability for idols to establish relationships with their fans, who then fall head over heels for their favorite artist. To keep in touch with their loyal followers, celebrities host autograph signings, appear on talk shows, and regularly update Twitters or me2days (Korea’s biggest social-networking site). This constant communication bridges an otherwise insurmountable gap between celebrities and fans. Fans opinion is so important that Korean entertainment companies regulate an artist’s appearance to extremes, sometimes even restricting personal romantic relationships between artists in order to avoid follower upset.

In fact, the opinions of fans have become so crucial to celebrities that they often become an idol’s worst nightmare. This is especially true of Korean blogging communities. Some bloggers are capable of discovering extremely personal information—addresses, phone numbers, and high school photos—and can distribute them online. Information about celebrities can therefore spread infinitely faster among fans, generating a chain reaction of celebrity propaganda exchange. Internationally, websites geared primarily towards non-Korean fans, such as www.allkpop.com, remain extremely up-to-date with the latest dramas, album releases, and celebrity gossip. The constant updates increase the familiarity of Korean artists’ foreign lives, fostering unreasonable attachment to their arguably superficial nature.

It’s no wonder then that hallyu has spread so far. With charming, seemingly perfect celebrities reaching out to fans in ways far more personal than artists do in America, it is pretty easy to fall under the spell. True, there may be less sincerity behind those wide-eyed smiles and pretty faces, but it has not really stopped me from enjoying Korean entertainment. Considering that the Korean wave is reaching all four corners of the earth, though, I’m not the only one.
Animals around the World...

It’s dinner time, and you are thinking to yourself, “What should I eat tonight?” Assuming you aren’t a vegetarian, your first instinct is probably one of the staple meats: beef, pork, chicken, or fish. Maybe you’re feeling a bit daring and consider shellfish, turkey, veal, or venison. Think your cuisine is varied? Think again! Here are some animals that would never appear on an American menu but are a part of the human diet elsewhere around the world...

Editor’s note: caution—may not be appropriate for meal-time reading.

Chinese Giant Salamanders

Reaching lengths of nearly six feet, the Chinese giant salamander (Andrias davidianus) is the world’s largest living amphibian, edging out the other two members of its over-sized family (Cryptobranchidae). Although it may be easily dismissed as unlovable and boring—it is wrinkly, drab-colored, and somewhat fearsome in appearance—the Chinese giant salamander is a remarkable species for those who care to look beneath their unattractive surface. Those “ugly” skin folds actually enhance the Chinese giant’s ability to breathe underwater, increasing the surface area for oxygen-absorption through the skin. This nocturnal predator of beastly proportions can suck prey—mostly crustaceans and fish—into its mouth, where it bites into its food with tremendous force. CHOMP!

Despite having no natural predators, the Chinese giant salamander often finds itself on the dinner table. Many Chinese view this salamander as a six-foot delicacy. Additionally, practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine value the Chinese giant salamander’s skin as an ingredient in burn treatments and its flesh as a preventative for graying hair. Due to over-poaching and habitat loss, the Chinese giant salamander unfortunately a critically endangered species. Because it is not as superficially cute as the ever-popular panda, the Chinese giant salamander has not been a target for conservation efforts. However, if this attitude does not change soon, Cryptobranchidae may shrink to a mere family of two, and China will lose one of its greatest exemplars of biodiversity.

Dolphins

While most Americans think of dolphins as intelligent and adorable marine animals, a small number of people halfway around the world view them as a source of traditional cuisine. In Taiji, a southwestern Japanese town with a population of three thousand, fishermen hunt dolphins daily. The meat can be eaten raw (like sashimi), fried, or stewed, and reportedly tastes like venison or beef with a coppery aftertaste.

This practice of eating dolphins has recently drawn high-profile media coverage and international criticism. Some view the dolphin hunts as cruel and brutal, but local fishermen claim that outsiders have no right to criticize their consumption of dolphins due to cultural differences. Others are concerned that dolphin meat tends to contain a significant level of mercury and is unsafe for consumption. Despite the ensuing debate, Taiji locals continue to maintain their traditional practices, stressing the need for others to understand the town’s culture.
That We Eat!

Grasshoppers

With each sharp crunch, the flavor of this seasonal delight spreads through your mouth. Each bite is a flavorful experience. Boiled, sprinkled with salt, then roasted to golden-brown perfection, the grasshopper is a delicacy in various parts of Africa. Not so easily found when the soaring sun bakes the equatorial landscape, these jumping critters are prevalent—and in demand—during the long rains (March to May) and short rains (October to December). Not just a delicious snack, grasshoppers are nutritious too! They are high in calcium and protein content and are good sources of carbohydrates, iron, and fat as well.

Horses

Horses have been given the status of “pets” in the United States, but in some parts of the world, horsemeat is actually a gourmand’s delight. Though the Australian diet doesn’t consist of any horsemeat, Australia has a prominent horse-slaughter industry that ships to Japan, Europe, and Russia. In Japan, horsemeat is called sakuraniku, literally “cherry blossom meat” because of its pink color, and is often served as sashimi. Austrian hot dog stands of ten sell horse Leberkäse as part of their menu. Ethnic groups with nomadic roots, such as those in Kazakhstan or Chile, view horsemeat as a much more essential part of their diet due to its easy accessibility and versatility; horsemeat can be smoked, boiled, dried, or made into sausages. Interestingly enough, though horsemeat is much less acceptable in the U.S. now, Harvard University actually had horsemeat on its Faculty Club’s menu for over a century until 1985.

Puffins

In the summer of 2008, Hell’s Kitchen chef Gordon Ramsey created a stir among many animal lovers when he was caught on film enjoying a raw puffin heart in the middle of a puffin hunt in Iceland. During the trip, Gordon Ramsey had allegedly caught a puffin in his net, taken out its heart, and eaten the organ while it was still warm.

However, the ancient Icelanders have been devouring puffin heart as a common local treat well before the advent of television chefs. Home to some of the largest puffin colonies in the world, the Icelanders of the Westman Islands became known as “sky fishers,” or hunters of the sky. These ancient hunters would use large nets to trap low-flying puffins for food and sport.

Many find that raw puffin heart tastes similar to a fishy chicken or duck. It is sometimes smoked or pan fried, though the most authentic way to enjoy puffin is still catching it fresh. A connoisseur of fine Icelandic dining might, like Gordon Ramsey, catch a puffin by net, break its neck, and eat the raw puffin heart on the spot.

“Any and all authority is shit. It’s forbidden to forbid!” reads the banner unfurled from a rooftop across from Gostiny Dvor, the posh shopping mall in the center of St. Petersburg that draws thousands of Western tourists to its high-end boutiques every year. This unexpected maneuver seems to catch the OMON (a sort of Russian SWAT team) by surprise and it takes them a good half hour to get to the top of the building and remove the anarchist slogan. For the moment, St. Petersburg hardly seems the “Venice of the North” of cruise ship brochures. The sign and accompanying flares are by far the most successful action that night by Strategy 31, Russia’s most visible anti-government opposition movement. Taking their name from the 31st article of the Russian Constitution, Strategy-31 seeks to defend the right of Russian citizens to “assemble peacefully, without weapons, hold rallies, meetings and demonstrations, marches and pickets.” In short, they are fighting against the neglected state of democracy, freedom of speech and human rights in the Russian Federation. Unfortunately, despite a fair amount of Western media attention, Strategy-31 and other Russian opposition movements remain relatively fractured and ineffective. Questionable leadership, ruthlessly effective state control, and the inaction of the youth have kept the protests from effecting any real change.

It is not hard to see why opposition groups like Strategy-31 have formed in Russia. Under Vladimir Putin, who has served as either Prime Minister or President for over eleven years now, political and personal freedoms have steadily eroded under the banner of a strong central government to the point where Russia now stands at 107th on The Economist’s Democracy Index, placing it four places ahead of Haiti and Iraq. With Putin at the top, the central power structure revolves around a select group of siloviki, former state security force members who are given the inside track to political and economic opportunities. Those who try and get in their way, such as Novaya Gazeta journalist Anna Politovskaya or business magnate Mikhail Khodorkovsky, wind up dead or in prison, respectively. Adding insult to injury, this power structure has bred a top down culture of bribery that gives Russia its 154 ranking on the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, two spots worse than Iran. Although anti-corruption and pro democracy rhetoric have become standard in the speeches of current president Dmitri Medvedev, who is widely viewed as Putin’s puppet and placeholder until Putin can run again in 2012, there seems to be little hope for change on the horizon for Russia.

The main action of Strategy-31 is the organization of protests on the 31st of each month that has one. The first of these semi-monthly gatherings took place in July of 2009 in Moscow and they have since spread across Russia from Arkhangelsk to Vladivostok. Even exiles and expatriates abroad can attend the protests in London, TelAviv, and New York City. By 7 P.M. on one October night in St. Petersburg, a few hundred people had gathered outside the Gostiny Dvor Metro Station, having heard of the protest either through word of mouth or by means of Russia’s primary opposition outlet, an online blogging site called LiveJournal. Although OMON line the plaza on all sides, there is a strange calm before the storm as a mix of photographers, bystanders, and activists mill around rather aimlessly. Suddenly, the crowd lurches amid a barrage of cameras flashing in the direction of a megaphone that is hard to hear over the commotion. It does not take long for the protesters to prove their point about Article 31. With an efficiency that can only come with practice, one of the half dozen OMON squads rams through the crowd Storm Trooper style, breaking through the human shield surrounding the first speaker and dragging him away to the awaiting paddy wagon. The whole ordeal takes about thirty seconds, repeating every five minutes or so for the next two hours.

To watch the protesters step up one by one to the megaphone only to be hauled away moments later is in striking parallel to the futility of Russian opposition groups. Opposition voices rise up to the megaphone again and again, but are never really able to express a coherent message before being
squashed by the ruthlessly effective police state. Both aspects of this scene, the disjointed and fractured opposition and the efficiency of anti-opposition measures play a role in the Russian opposition movements’ general lack of success to date.

To get a sense of the fragmented nature of opposition coalitions in Russia, consider Strategy-31 organizer, Edward Limonov’s political arm, The Other Russia. Essentially, the coalition is a union of Limonov’s fascist National Bolshevik party and former chess champion Gary Kasparov’s Western style liberal group The United Civil Front. Between such strange bedfellows, the only clear message that ever emerges is “Putin Must Go.” What to do once he’s gone is of secondary importance. Although this kind of multi-fronted, platform-less opposition has recently succeeded in toppling Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, its fractured nature has no doubt weakened the Russian groups’ ability to elicit change.

One voice, however, is noticeably missing from this rally and the Russian opposition movements: young people. The youth movement was both the spark and the driving force for the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. In Russia, this movement is almost nonexistent. In fact, the only substantial youth organization in the country is the pro-Putin Nashi movement, whose devotion to Putin’s cult of personality has drawn comparisons to the Hitler Youth. The reasons for their absence are twofold. First, Russia’s demographic structure is nearly opposite that of the Middle East’s. Two decades of low birth rates have left Russia with a severely inverted population pyramid, whereas the Arab world has undergone a massive population boom leaving it with a large, unemployed and unhappy youth population. The second, and less quantifiable, factor contributing to the absence of a serious youth movement is the palpable state of apathy among the youth in Russia.

The source of this apathy may simply be that the Russian youth is too old. In 1998, Russia was two years removed from an expensive and deadly war in Chechnya, defaulting on its debt, and ruled by a mentally and physically ailing Boris Yeltsin. Ten years later, GDP had doubled, life expectancies had dramatically increased, and Russian heart-throb Dima Bilan had just won Eurovision. Coinciding with this surprising recovery was the equally rapid and unexpected rise of, then little-known, KGB agent Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. In sum, Putin promised recovery at the cost of democracy, strength at the cost of freedom. Whether or not Putinism had anything to do with Russia’s recovery, the massive improvement in living conditions during his tenure has brought immense popularity to Putin and his ruling United Russia party. The twenty and thirty-somethings who should be driving these protests are old enough to remember the gangland lawlessness of the 90’s, old enough to remember how bad things really were. In the whole scheme of things, to them, the death of a few journalists here and there seems fairly minor.

Nearing the end of the Petersburg protest, a middle age woman remarks: “And where are the students? Where are the young people?” With the temperature dropping and most of the real activists already hauled away, the remnants of the crowd have evaporated fairly quickly. Within a few hours, there will be absolutely no sign of the protest that had taken place. Instead of the angry crowd that had gathered earlier, the plaza will be filled with happy, tipsy and increasingly Americanized Russian young adults enjoying the relatively recent import of Halloween.

While Strategy-31 has garnered international attention, and even minor concessions from local authorities as to their protests, it has been wholly ineffective in motivating a real shake-up of the Russian political system. The lack of a coherent message and complete absence of a youth movement make it all too easy for the Russian government to push Strategy-31 and other opposition movements aside. As of right now, they appear to stand little chance of preventing Putin from taking the newly extended Presidency in 2012. Unfortunately, given the material gains that have occurred under Putin, the vast majority of Russians just don’t seem to care.
It is freezing. I do not mean the draw-your-coat-a-little-closer type of freezing; I mean teeth-chattering, hands-shaking, body-shivering type of freezing. I try to shuffle forward on to the bus that will drop us off at the airport arrival terminal and try not to make eye contact but I am unsuccessful.

“Are you returning home after the holidays?”

At least, I think that is what she said. Surprisingly, I am not very good at distinguishing British accents. The people sound completely different in reality than they do on television. I politely nod and smile in response to the bus driver’s question, hoping she will not continue the conversation. We arrive at my destination and I fight my way through a sea of strange-smelling bodies to the terminal floor. The airport is cacophony of different languages, all spoken simultaneously by various people of every race and nationality. There are Indian saris, Muslim hijabs, and an assortment of other global fashions, all too much for me to assimilate. What am I doing here?

Nervously waiting to get through Border Patrol at London’s Heathrow International Airport just six days after the foiled Christmas terrorist plot, I am nearly terrified. What frightens me the most is that the culprit was Nigerian; a dark-faced, young man, hailing from the Western half of the Motherland. I am Nigerian. Even though my passport brightly displays the golden seal of my American citizenship, letting me go virtually anywhere in the world with no questions asked, I am still scared. I clutch my portfolio, holding tight onto my pertinent documents, even bringing it close to my chest while practicing my innocuous and polite smiles to strangers around me.

“What are you doing in the country?”

“I am to here to study abroad.”

“For less than six months?”

I nod. He then carefully examines me, attention alternating between my face and passport. After I reassure him that my trip back to the United States is accounted for, he stamps my passport and motions for me to walk through, finally opening the gates of freedom into the euro-driven continent. I passed through the border of the United Kingdom without even having my documents verified.

I head through baggage claim and customs with no problems. At the London Underground, also known as the “Tube,” I am briefly thwarted by the numerous staircases. Lucky for me, a nice British man kindly offers to help me carry my two heavy suitcases, yet I find myself still exhausted by the time I enter the Tube.

Too busy in the trance of observing my fellow passengers, I almost miss my stop. They were all dressed so nicely, much nicer than people groom themselves in the United States. At this point, I had yet to see a person wearing jeans other than myself; the people around me were all clothed in elegant wool coats and fancy pants.

The second Tube train is not as nice. The air is slightly pungent, the people aren’t as nicely dressed, and the seats are faded from overuse. I find myself having to sit on top of my suitcase because there isn’t any space left. In retrospect, the shabbiness of this Tube train should have been a sign. But I did not realize anything was wrong until I reached my stop.

“Next,” says the officer, giving me the cue to fall into the line of investigation.

My heart beats erratically, even as he politely mutters, “Hello.”

I respond surreptitiously, trying to clear my throat and bring myself back to an awakened state.
“Are you an international student?” I stare at her trying to decipher her words. *International Student, what?* I continued to stare at her wishing she could repeat her words slowly.

“Are you here to participate in the study abroad program?” I blink, letting thirty seconds pass.

“Yes,” I hastily respond, feeling foolish. Of course I am an international student here. I discreetly peer over my shoulder wondering if anyone else had witnessed the embarrassing exchange. I quickly turn back around to accept my room key, mailbox key, and access card.

My dorm, or as the British call it, Hall of Residence, consists of two separate apartments on each floor. I negotiate my suitcase through the narrow doors of my apartment and enter my new abode. Slowly, I open the door and peer inside. Leaning my suitcase against the wall, I flop onto my new bed, too tired to unpack anything. My eyes blearily focus on the brightly colored paper that states in bold print, “WELCOME TO YOUR NEW HOME!” My final thought just before drifting asleep; I hope I do not have any more days like this one.

Chicken bones, plastic linoleum bags, soggy tissue paper—an assortment of other things that I dare not look at too closely—litter the street. *It is just so dirty.* My first glimpse of London is not promising. I gingerly step out of the awning of the Tube station, careful to avoid stepping on the half-eaten and greasy remnants of what appears to be someone’s lunch. I stumble into my suitcase, banging my leg nosily against it. I was pushed forward by a tiny Pakistani woman covered in a hijab, scrambling to board the already over-crowded 25 Bus. I lean down to rub my bruised calf and sigh. *Why am I here again?*

As I walk down Mile End Road, I cannot help but compare its mangy, desolate street to the grey cement pathways that decorate Duke’s campus. It is the first day of classes and instead of settling into my comfortable room in Kilgo Quad, I am shuffling down the streets of London’s East End towards my new school. This is not how I expected London to look. For one thing, there are no quaint red Double Decker buses. Instead, a series of very long, bendy buses sporting names like “The 205 Paddington Circus” or “The 277 Hackney Central” roam the streets.

“Watch out!” screams a man with a very thick Cockney accent. Suddenly, I remember that I need to look left instead of right when crossing the street. I quickly step back onto the pavement, clutching my chest and marveling at my near escape. I have been in the country for less than four hours and already I have almost been killed. This is not how I envisioned my first day abroad.

On my way to the Queen Mary University, where I will be studying, I pass four fast food restaur-
“Are we going to heaven?”

Tina’s diva-like voice rang out in the cramped stairwell. It was a relevant question considering we were twelve girls – all avid chocolate lovers – climbing up three flights of stairs to a chocolate tasting that our study abroad program in Strasbourg, France arranged for us. A waitress had greeted us at the entrance of Christian’s, a locally renowned chocolate and pastry shop, and guided us through the bustling, high-class café to a dark, damp stairwell. As we clomped up the wooden steps, we buzzed with anticipation. Yes, Tina, we are going to heaven.

Heaven turned out to be a brightly lit kitchen on the third floor with massive, chrome sinks and a huge marble countertop in the middle. After barking orders in French at two assistants, Christian, the owner himself, met us in the kitchen. He spoke in accented but fluent English and asked us where we were from and how we liked Strasbourg. We answered only obligingly, clearly more fascinated by and eager to taste the chocolate.

We started with dark chocolate. Christian brought out several thin slabs of different types – one from Peru, another from Cameroon, and some from Vietnam and Madagascar. He broke off the corner of the Peruvian and passed the rest of it around. As we each broke off a sliver, he explained how each region’s chocolate had a distinct flavor because of differences in the soil’s mineral composition, age of the tree, amount of rainfall, period of fermentation, and a slew of other factors. We melted the chocolate in our mouths and, as instructed by Christian, slightly breathed in and out to mix the chocolate with the air. At first, the chocolate just tasted classically bitter but as it continued to melt, we were surprised by the other flavors that were unlocked. The Peruvian chocolate left a lingering taste of raspberry and red fruit, while the Vietnamese had a citrusy tang.

The unique flavors of these dark chocolates formed Christian’s base for inventing truffles. He matched the Bolivian with orange zest and balsamic vinaigrette then paired the Haitian with apple jelly and chili spice. Like a painter, he drew from his palette of flavors—strawberry, lime, praline, hazelnut, lavender—and created flavors that had never existed before. He stressed, however, that throwing together random flavors does not ensure success. Wild imagination has to be moderated with technical expertise to avoid winding up with an aromatic mess. Only the fusion of precise chemist and bold artist could concoct a truffle with the saltiness of chili spice that perfectly accentuates the sweetness of apples.
Despite the fierce and chilly winter air, we felt giddy and content. Part of the reason for our mood was the chocolate-high, but another part was the optimism inspired by Christian’s talk, which had transcended mere chocolate. All of his tenets for chocolate had been metaphors for philosophies of life. He stressed the ideas that everything is a unique product of its environment and the importance of balancing imagination with sound practicality. I was especially moved by his central tenet: chocolate is always changing.

In college, life is always in flux: interests shift, relationships evolve, future plans are rewritten. This place where you are right now will never exist in exactly the same way again. France, for me, was only one semester. Duke is only four years. It will all end, like the brief sensation of a piece of chocolate melting in your mouth. While other people panic, Christian embraces these changes. He does not fret about the impermanence of the flavors he has now, but instead savors them to the fullest. He does not dwell on the uncertainty of the future or consider all the ways things could go wrong. The future is unwritten, and as Christian sees it, 

therein lies infinite opportunities.

By this point, a dozen kinds of chocolates and truffles were scattered on the table. We reached across the counter to grab more of our favorite truffles, trying to decide which among this crazy mix of flavors we liked best. None of us had ever imagined chocolate could be so dynamic—that it could be both so subtle and so vibrant. “Chocolate is always changing,” Christian said. It changes as it is grown, as it is fermented, as it is mixed with other ingredients, and then finally, as it melts in the mouth. The chocolate we eat today will taste different from what will we eat next year, meaning Christian will continue juggling flavors to form novel combinations. This seems to be the source of Christian’s passion for chocolate: bite-sized masterpieces that are so ephemeral and so unique.

After two and half hours of chocolate tasting, Christian finally wrapped up his talk. We thanked him with enthusiastic applause, then gathered our coats and bags and clomped back down the ancient staircase. We passed through the café again and marveled at truffles placed in neat and elegant packaging, having a greater appreciation now that we knew more about their crafting.
HELPing Guatemala by Naima Ritter
It started raining around three in the afternoon, just three days after the volcano erupted near Guatemala City. The rain continued to pour relentlessly throughout the entirety of the next day, ceaseless and monotonous. By the third day, parts of my host's home were completely flooded and the walls were soaked, forcing us to relocate our beds in our search for a reprieve from the ubiquitous water.

This was how my summer in Guatemala began. I was in Guatemala with a mission: to find out why local women were reluctant to use the improved cook-stoves that they had been given by HELPS International, an NGO that promotes healthcare, education, economic development and environmental protection for the indigenous people of Latin America. Scholars have found that the use of traditional open-fire stoves in Africa, Asia, and Latin America has negative effects on public health, the economy, and the environment. However, a significant portion of the world still depends on this type of cooking despite the consequent prolonged smoke inhalation—one of the leading health risks in the developing world. The black carbon soot from open fires is an important contributor to global warming as well, while the unbridled gathering of firewood is a major cause of deforestation in many developing countries.

My research in Guatemala has been preceded by a few decades of organized attempts to improve the main cooking methods in Guatemala. One such method introduced more efficient wood burning stoves, also known as improved cook stoves (ICSs), which reduce both smoke and wood consumption. Efforts to introduce these ICSs have resulted in mixed outcomes, leading to several studies, including my own, that are attempting to identify the benefits and barriers to widespread ICS dissemination.

The floodwaters, however, postponed my initial goal of research. Most of the roads to my target community had been flooded or covered in landslides, forcing my attention onto other, more immediate issues. A community close to my host town had suffered severe damage from the flood, and one of my friend’s relatives lived there. Her home had been completely destroyed, so we went to see how we could help.

I initially thought that the flooding had not been terrible, but as I moved further into the community, the destruction became more apparent. The roads, now streets of soft mud, were nearly impossible to cross; I sank knee-high into the mess and had to be roped out. Houses had been filled with mud a meter high, cars had been flipped onto their backs, and enormous boulders had been dislodged from nearby hills, annihilating houses in their paths. I saw four men carrying a stretcher alongside women sobbing at their sides—someone had died under the mud. I had not realized what was going on until they passed by me and I caught a glimpse of the muddy elbow dangling loosely from under the ragged cloth. The horror of it all made the entire scene seem surreal, as if on television, rather than right in front of me. It was hard to take in the reality of the destruction—eight hundred people had been killed by the storm, of which over thirty had been from this community that was a mere ten minutes away from where I had been.

The next few days passed by in a blur, and the images of the devastation I had seen accompanied me wherever I went. I felt my priorities shifting as the days passed by and the extent of the damage became clear. Though my original project was important, I couldn’t shake off the overwhelming desire to address the immediate issue of the flood.

Floodwaters had broken water pipes and contaminated drinking wells, rivers, and lakes. Clean drinking water was an immediate concern. In conjunction with HELPS International, I launched a fundraising campaign to buy water filters for storm victims. Through the donations of various friends and family members, we were able to provide water filters for a few local communities, at least giving the villagers drinkable water amidst the chaos.

Despite this success, I realized that my efforts to help had only been reactionary, not preventative. This type of tragic event would not be the only one of its kind. Villages in Guatemala will be increasingly susceptible to these calamities because of climate change and deforestation, which increases erosion and makes flooding an even greater possibility. These disasters can be prevented but will require a wholesale change in the communities’ approach to environmental conservation. My research will hopefully play a small part in this change, ensuring the betterment of both the environment and the locals, but the change must ultimately come from within the nation. Guatemala must now help itself.
Humans are creatures of habit. In spite of all our idiosyncrasies and perceived spontaneity, we find ourselves sleeping in the same bed every night; ordering the same value meal at McDonalds; going to the same weekly, extracurricular meetings that are always scheduled at the same time; hanging out with the same people, often of the same race; sitting in the same seat in class and only taking classes in the same few departments; exercising on the same machine or running the same route; and listening to the same iTunes playlist over and over. We thrive in our routine and spurn the unexplored, even subconsciously. We feel lost without a pattern to follow.

While our habitual nature might be invaluable to everyday sanity and functionality, it comes at the cost of isolating us to a miniscule subset of experience and deadening us to the vibrancy of new experiences waiting all around us. This past winter break I incidentally served as the provocateur of a radical new experience for one unsuspecting population: Kenyan children.

One of my best friends at Duke is an international student from rural Kenya, and I had the pleasure of him showing me around his village and home area this past December and January. The safari soon proved to be one of the most profound sources of novel experiences not only for me, but also for some of my hosts. In short, the day’s journey that took us from the capital of Nairobi to my friend’s home in the Rift Valley led us to a region that is rarely traversed by white people. While many of the adults and teenagers of the villages surrounding my friend’s home had seen white people in person at some point in their lives, I was the first white person many of the children had ever seen with their own two eyes.

What struck me most about meeting Kenyan kids over my travels, oftentimes running into the walking through the village unannounced and unsuspected, was not necessarily that they had a strong reaction to seeing me, but that each child would react in one of a few very distinct ways. I had been warned by my friend that kids might be shocked when they saw me, but I suppose I believed that they would all respond in more or less the same way. This was categorically not the case. Each child would react in one of the following six ways, and which group a child fell into was unmistakable:

**Criers**

Indeed, a few of the smaller kids who were old enough to comprehend that my skin color was foreign but not yet old enough to say or do much about it would just cry. Thankfully, there were only a handful of these cases!

**Scream-and-Starers**

The scream-and-stare kids are essentially self-explanatory: they would be so surprised that they would scream out, partially in shock and partially to alert their friends that there was an alien roaming around. After the short scream, these kids would then get to a “safe distance” and stare at me, generally trying to find something to hide behind like a bush or fence. They would then attempt to spy on me without letting me seeing them, an often failed attempt.

**Gigglers**

The gigglers thought I was the funniest joke they had ever seen. Laughs would range from bashful giggling to full scale belly-laughing and pointing. Usually the gigglers would not even attempt to mask their state of hilarity. It was likewise funny for me to see how the gigglers would try to calm themselves upon greeting me, and many times I was introduced to kids who were still laughing uncontrollably at the very sight of me.
Some kids would make absolutely no physical or verbal response to seeing me except to just stop whatever they were doing and stare at me. They would not motion to their friends or let out a giggle or smile, for their eyes were simply locked on my skin as if it was the only thing that existed at that point in time. These kids would even have a hard time remembering to extend their hand to shake mine in greeting.

Kenya is world-renowned for its runners, and I got a sneak peek of its future athletes; when some of the little ones got a glimpse of me, they ran for the hills, literally. Instead of bothering with reacting to the bizarre situation of my skin color, some kids would simply run away. Sometimes they would run at a distance then turn around to gaze at me from afar, but on other encounters, they would simply run until I was completely out of sight and out of mind. On the few occasions when we announced our plans of travelling in advance, some would even run from our destination in advance in order to avoid greeting me.

The final group treated me, upon greeting them, like we were already best friends. They would come straight up to me, fearlessly ask for handshake, and begin asking me questions in the broken English they learned in school alongside Swahili. I was questioned thoroughly by these kids, as every good intruder should be, and was often impressed with their precociousness. Many of the inquisitors would also want to touch my blond hair and white face, although only a few were brave enough to ask.

After experiencing all these distinct reactions, I wondered: which would I be? If I had been in their shoes, which reaction would I have had? There is no “average” or “middle ground” to assume; all the reactions are unique, unequivocal, and do not fall along any kind of continuum. In the end, I realized there was no way of knowing which of these groups of kids I would have fallen into, but I did believe that there was something powerful about the range of these reactions.

It is a part of the privilege that often comes with being a Duke student that we often do not have to bother ourselves with new experiences if we don’t want to. We buy insurance and extended warranties, we form habits, and we insulate ourselves in the Duke bubble all in an effort to avoid the new. We forget what it means to be shocked or surprised, to put ourselves out there, and to make ourselves vulnerable. For me, the paradigmatic reactions of the Kenyan kids allowed me to remember all of the profound range of emotions we miss out on when we content ourselves with the familiar. We forget what it means to be so surprised that we let out a scream, so tickled by something strange that we just can’t stop laughing, so struck that we do not know which way to move or what to say, so uneasy that we have no choice but to turn and run, so powerless that we break down and cry, or so curious that questions just refuse to stop coming to mind.

Our generation is increasingly relying on fictitious movies and literature to provide emotional responses that we can at once feel affected by and be removed from. Maybe, though, we should take a lesson from the Kenyan children and indulge ourselves with interacting and reacting, intensely and decisively, to all the new possibilities for experience that surround us daily.
In the summer of 2010, I participated in North Carolina State University’s Ethnographic Field School in Guatemala. The goal of the program is to provide students with practical training and experience in sociocultural anthropology fieldwork through living with an indigenous Mayan family. Home of the ancient Maya civilization, Guatemala has a rich history and cultural heritage and still even boasts the largest Mayan population of any country. With an estimated fourteen million inhabitants today, indigenous Mayan groups make up forty percent of the total population living in the country’s highlands. The largest and most traditional Mayan populations are in the western highlands, which have the highest density of Mayan groups, strongest retention of Mayan identification, and least penetration of influences from the national ladino (or “hispanicized”) culture. For these reasons, the region is known as “the heartland of traditional Mayan culture.”

I lived in a small conservative town in the western highlands called San Antonio Palopó. It is one of twelve Mayan villages situated around Lake Atitlan, a volcanic lake recognized as the deepest in Central America and world-renowned for its beauty. Geographic isolation and limited contact with individuals from the dominant national population has helped Mayan groups around the lake retain some degree of autonomy in their villages, which in turn has helped much of the cultural and linguistic preservation of the region today. In San Antonio Palopó, Mayan culture is still prevalent due to the maintenance of the Kaqchikel language (one of the historical native Mayan languages of the region) and a distinct style of traditional dress known as traje. The Maya people of San Antonio Palopó rely on subsistence farming and are well known for their beautiful handwoven goods. Although they continue to experience discrimination and pressures to change from the national ladino population, the Maya are a proud people who continue to fight for their cultural and linguistic rights in society. Living amongst them was such an enchanting and humbling experience.

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