



Sharing East Asian History via Human Experience at Albion College

by Cynthia Mwenja, PhD

Joseph W. Ho, Assistant Professor of History at Albion College, weaves East Asian history, photography, and his boundless creativity into both his teaching and his scholarship, and he far exceeds expectations in his service to students and the campus community. More than his extensive accomplishments, however, his students and colleagues value his enduring kindness and remarkable ability to make and sustain human connections.

“Professor Magic”

On her first day of her first college term, Kaylee Peterson, now a junior at Albion majoring in biology, entered Ho’s “American Encounters with China” class. “He knew everyone’s names—all of his classes, every name. I saw that this guy cares.” At that moment, she says, she “knew college would be okay.” As she has gotten to know Ho, she has grown to admire his talent for re-phrasing and re-packaging students’ half-formed ideas to show their relevance and importance; she calls this gift of Ho’s “professor magic.”

In his office hours, Ho provides tea and snacks; he has dubbed these sessions “Tea Hours,” and they are quite popular with current students as well as student researchers in history and the Honors program. Rachel Goldner, an Albion senior majoring in history and sociology—and minoring in psychology—appreciates the time he is willing to take with students. According to Peterson, Ho reinforces the idea that he is available to his students for whatever they may need. Aislinn Meszaros, Albion senior and current student teacher, met Ho when she

was employed at Albion prior to becoming a student; she says that he “still treated her as one of his own, inviting her to lectures” and discussing her future plans. She notes that recent semesters have been tough, and Ho offers his support to every student; his “tea hours” exemplify the warm welcome he gives to everyone.

Ho helps his students connect with others, as well. Lydia Gilbert, who has taken three classes with Ho, is currently an Albion senior, double majoring in English and Social Studies, with a concentration in secondary education. She says that Ho knows many people, and he helps students contact those who can “help students reach their goals.” He put her in touch with a professor who works on historical responses to epidemics and pandemics. As Ho serves on her thesis committee, Gilbert values his “open door policy,” noting that he “always finds ways to connect emotionally and tangibly” with his students. As one example, Gilbert recalls that Ho sent World War II postcards to each student at the completion of the term; hers was a postcard from a soldier, and she treasures this artifact.

Courses

Ho has developed a wide array of courses that center on—and often combine—his array of interests. His most ambitious class in terms of time span and geography is “East Asia: Culture and Civilization.” This survey course covers a time span of 2000 BCE to the current day, across East Asia. “So many dynasties!” Meszaros laughs.

In “Visualizing East Asia,” students examine image-making in China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. In this class, Ho lets students use his collection of historical cameras to capture images. Chris Riedel, Assistant Professor of History at Albion, says that Ho’s camera collection—with some representatives from the 19th century—represents Ho’s niche, bringing together East Asian history, visual cultures behind photography and filmmaking, and attention to the mechanical aspects of the devices. Riedel says that Ho has his students use the cameras so that they really think more about how specific technologies guide the photographer to interact differently with the environment. Noah Simmons, Albion 2021 graduate, remains deeply impressed with the



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOSEPH W. HO

experience of taking these cameras outside, snapping pictures, then being able to use a darkroom to develop the images. He says that this sort of experience demonstrates Ho's habit of going "above and beyond to connect [students] further to the material."

Ho employs his trademark style of hands-on and compelling instruction in teaching "Modern China," "STEM in East Asian History," "Saints and Sinners: Histories of Christianity in China," "World War II in the Pacific," along with directed study sections. As Associate Director of the Prentiss M. Brown Honors Program, he teaches "American Encounters with China: Cross-Cultural Histories and Global Dynamics"; Peterson says this class remains one of her favorite Honors classes.

Engaged Teaching

Ho shines as a professor, due to his lively and creative class activities. Ho says that

"history is a process to experience. It involves technology and devices that preserve imaginations." He strives to offer his students a sort of "hands-on time travel." Marcy Sacks, Julian S. Rammelkamp Professor of History and History Department Chair at Albion College, attributes his teaching success to his "Extraordinary patience in ... trying to find ways to help students learn, not just teaching content of his classes but teaching ways of seeing and moving in the world." In one class she sat in on, Sacks says, Ho shared images to bring the content to life; one image was of his toddler son dressed in historical costume. Ho was discussing elements of culture and history, but this moment made the "exotic and foreign seem real and present," along with humanizing Ho even further to his students. Sacks notes the courage required for a professor to become part of the lesson.

Joseph W. Ho shines as a professor, due to his lively and creative class activities. Ho says that "history is a process to experience.

It involves technology and devices that preserve imaginations." He strives to offer his students a sort of "hands-on time travel."



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOSEPH W. HO

Laura Brade, Assistant Professor of History at Albion, admires the array of resources Ho brings to the classroom. She recalls one activity in particular, in which he dresses as a time-traveling Chinese professor from the mid-1930s, then has the students interview him. Meszaros adds that the class also told the “visitor” about innovations since that time, especially as he—in character—struggled to understand the existence of iPhones and the internet. Goldner says that Ho incorporates many different teaching styles to appeal to students in a variety of ways: “Notes, videos, creative activities.” In teaching about timekeeping in premodern Japan, she says, Ho had students make their own water clocks. Sometimes, she says, he will hold class debates in which he will play the part of the judge or the opposition. She is sad to have missed the day that Ho had students “map [Albion’s] campus using tools” from European missionary surveying teams in 18th century China.

Simmons says that he “always thoroughly enjoyed attending Dr. Ho’s lectures as the detailed descriptions he gave painted truly vivid pictures, like opening a

Be. Overly. Protected.

Acoustic Doors

Metal



- Metal Swinging Doors
- Fixed Window Systems
- STC ratings from 43 to 57
- Available with up to 3-hour fire labels

Wood Finish



- STC ratings of 43 through 50
- Dual-glazed Vision Lights
- Wood veneers and plastic laminates
- 3/4 hour and 20 minute fire labels

Bullet-Resistant Doors

Metal



- Weapon Protection Levels 1-8
- UL Standard for Safety 752
- Fixed and Teller Window Systems
- Pass-Throughs, Gun and Voice Ports

Wood Finished



- UL Standard for Safety 752
- Weapon Protection Levels 1-8
- Single or pair configurations
- Wood veneers and plastic laminates

OVERLY
DOOR COMPANY

Phone: 1-800-979-7300 • Fax: 724-830-2871 • E-mail: overly@overly.com • Web: www.overly.com



AT THE THRESHOLD OF SAFETY AND SECURITY

American Direct is uniquely positioned to provide access control technology, surveillance, credentials and mechanical door, frame and hardware products.

We own the door so you can focus on the things that matter most.

accessNsite.com/PUPN2022

AccessNsite[®]
by American Direct

window and looking directly into the past.” Gilbert says that, due to Ho’s instruction, she has a “much greater understanding of relationships between countries” and that her understanding extends far “beyond the Silk Road and gunpowder” surface perceptions

that many people have of East Asia. She says that Ho makes his classes as “immersive as possible”—not just “dates and dead people.”

Ho also takes his students on field trips. Simmons remembers a class visit to Albion’s Bobbit Visual Arts Center to study Japanese

woodblock prints, and Meszaros recounts a trip to the University of Michigan to see pottery from Japan, Korea, and China. Most recently, Ho’s Honors class worked with artifacts that had been sent from China to the 1884 World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans; these items are now preserved by the University of Michigan’s Museum of Anthropological Archeology. He uses this collection to ask students to create narratives from the point of view of a material object.

Meszaros appreciates the variety of teaching strategies that Ho uses, saying that “It’s not always lecture and notes; there’s also group project work and interactive activities.” She says that, during Covid times, Ho found ways to replicate his teaching approaches in the online classes. She is impressed with the ways that Ho brings to life a “subject that is often thought of as boring,” saying that “he wants students to experience, not just to learn.” Meszaros is currently working with fourth graders as a student teacher, and she has gone to Ho for advice about “how to bring dull topics to life in a way they can enjoy.” Goldner says that she was randomly assigned to Ho’s class in her first term. She enjoyed that class so much that she ended up taking a class with him almost every semester, ending up with a history major. Through all of his classroom approaches, Goldner says, Ho really “opened my eyes to perspectives of people from other countries; he opened my mind to issues that others face.”

Even Ho’s finals are engaging, Peterson says. In his seminar classes, students can pick any topic of interest covered during the term and talk about its history in depth; the final presentation must include a creative aspect, as well. Peterson, who aims to become a chiropractor, mapped the acupuncture meridians and gave a speech on acupuncture. She says that all of the student final presentations were interesting—they all enjoyed learning more from each other.

Scholarship

In his first single-authored book, *Developing Mission: Photography, Filmmaking, and American Missionaries in Modern China*, published by Cornell University Press in



Modern Receptacles: Anodized Aluminum, No Paint or Powdercoating to fail

DeepStreamDesign.com 305-857-0466

SportsArt

INSPIRED
PERFORMANCE.
UNPRECEDENTED
SUSTAINABILITY.

G660 Treadmill

SERVE TODAY'S GREEN-MINDED STUDENTS.

SportsArt and ECO-POWR™ offer something no other brand can—the ability to capture human exertion and turn it into usable electricity. Now your athletic center can align campus sustainability goals with student lifestyle and fitness expectations. Student-run environmental initiatives could even help offset the cost, making it easier and more affordable to bring innovative, reliable ECO-POWR™ equipment to your campus.



Discover how ECO-POWR™ and SportsArt can work for your university at gospportsart.com/university.

2021, Ho examines photographs and movies produced by American missionaries across the first half of the twentieth century. His forthcoming book will focus more closely on Catholic missionary photography in China's late imperial and republican eras. For these projects, he found photos, films, and writings stored in private residences. He says that the people he worked with to secure the materials—often the descendants of missionaries and Chinese Christians—felt his work validated their personal histories, breaking stereotypes frequently associated with missionaries; he tells a much more complicated, nuanced, and human story.

In discussing *War and Occupation in China: The Letters of an American Missionary from Hangzhou*, a collection of missionary letters that Ho co-edited, published by Lehigh University Press in 2017, Riedel notes the importance of “getting the scholarship out there.” These missionary artifacts that Ho

has worked with—both letters and images—provide unique perspectives on China's history, offering a view on ordinary people that can otherwise be difficult to access. Additionally, Riedel says, the missionaries had a different agenda than Chinese political groups, so the missionaries' materials provide a “fascinating resource.”

Ho is currently working on a chapter on missionary filmmaking technologies, part of an edited volume on the one hundredth anniversary of sixteen-millimeter film. According to Ho, many missionaries used the film and helped to popularize the medium. Riedel says that this sort of project is important because there's a real risk of losing the history of non-professional photography and film.

Collegiality

Brade says that she feels “incredibly lucky to have Joe as a colleague” because of his

innovative teaching strategies and thoughtfulness as a coworker. While she is not currently on campus, she says that in a normal term, they have offices across the hall from each other and routinely share strategies and advice. She says that they have been able to discuss interesting ways in which their research intersects; she has studied Czech refugees who ended up in Shanghai during World War II. Even Brade's young son loves Ho, drawing pictures of him and often asking when they will see him next.

Riedel says that Ho is a “warm, giving colleague” who “steps up,” volunteering to pick up extra tasks as needed; Riedel admires the “aplomb” with which Ho performs college and department service. The two joined the department at the same time, and Riedel appreciates the warm support he has experienced from Ho in their time together at Albion, saying that Ho is the ideal “colleague you want to have working with you.”

Nothing else compares to the Dynamic V8®

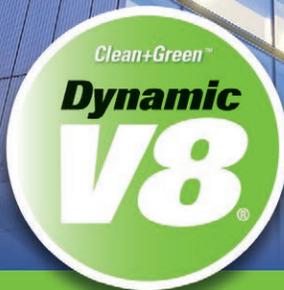
Energy costs are hitting the fan.

Over 20% of energy consumption in commercial buildings is HVAC supply and return fan usage – more than lighting in most buildings.



- We can cut fan energy in half
- 2/3 less fan energy than MERV 14 filters
- Extends filter service intervals from months to YEARS
- Better IAQ with MERV 15 performance
 - Removes ultrafine particles, VOCs odors, and airborne pathogens

MERV 15 air filtration and ideal for retrofits



Show Video



Visit DynamicAQS.com or ask us about a free Life Cycle Cost Analysis to find out how much you can save on fan energy and maintenance costs.

Dynamic
Air Quality Solutions
The Science of Clean Air.™

Even with Ho’s teaching strengths and academic accomplishments, his human strengths are most often noted. Sacks says that “He is a wonderful person—kind, good, caring, thoughtful; a marvelous colleague.” She also says that Ho “does not compartmentalize his life—research, family, teaching” blend seamlessly. In keeping with his habit of synthesizing his interests and experiences, Ho would encourage administrators of higher education to robustly support the humanities—these inter-related disciplines “equip students to understand the world” because they “reflect the complexity of human experience throughout time.” Students, Ho says, need these experiences. We all do.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dr. Cynthia Mwenja teaches Composition and Rhetoric at the University of Montevallo.



Modern Benches: Ergonomic, Maintenance Free, Anodized Aluminum, No Paint or Powdercoating to fail

DeepStreamDesign.com

Lifetime Structural Warranty

305-857-0466