

William L. Holland's Contributions to Asian Studies in Canada and at the University of British Columbia

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ONE OF THE PLEASANT things for the writer in coming to UBC in 1966 from an ancient English university was the climate of acceptance, both in the university and the community at large, of the importance and relevance of Asian studies. It seemed to be taken for granted by most people that Vancouver, looking outwards towards the Pacific and having a long history of shipping relations with the countries of Asia, as well as drawing an important segment of its population from those regions, was a natural place for Asian studies in an academic setting. Yet at that time the Department of Asian Studies was only five years old (having been founded in 1961) when William Holland arrived as its first Head.

This was not, of course, the beginning of UBC's involvement with Asia. As early as 1948 Dr. Ping-ti Ho joined the History Department. He came originally as a specialist in European economic history but inevitably his China interests asserted themselves, and soon he was teaching courses on China. In 1956 President MacKenzie started an Asian Studies Programme under Professor Soward, Head of the History Department, with Dr. Ho as its nucleus, and the following year he was joined by Ronald Dore in Japanese studies and Y.T. Wang, a second Chinese historian. A language programme in Chinese and Japanese was started and the foundations were laid for the Chinese and Japanese collections in the University Library. On the Chinese side this was achieved, through the good offices of Dr. Ho, by the acquisition in the name of the Friends of the UBC Library of the P'upan collection from Macao.

These were creditable beginnings that compared favourably with what was taking place elsewhere in Canada. It must be admitted, however, that Canada as a whole had been backward in this field.

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Immediately after the Second World War major countries of the English-speaking world, notably the United States, Great Britain and Australia, had responded in varying degrees to the new awareness that the war had brought of the need for more knowledge of Asian languages and civilizations. Canada, perhaps because of old habits of dependency on Great Britain and the United States, had done little. Toronto was the only other university besides UBC that had any sort of Asian programme, and even that had only begun in a serious way with the arrival of W.A.C.H. Dobson as Professor of Chinese in 1952.

When Professor Holland arrived at UBC in 1961, therefore, there was still a great deal to be done, both in the university and in the country. Dr. William Willmott, who arrived at UBC at the same time as Professor Holland, has described his achievements in these words:

At the time Bill arrived, the programme in Asian Studies listed twelve undergraduate courses, including language courses in both Japanese and Chinese. Chinese was offered to the third-year level and Japanese to the second. There were also a number of courses on literature in translation as well as area courses on China and Japan. The total enrollment was 103 students in the eight courses offered that year.

The department began with one partial and three full-time appointments, with Professor Holland as head. Professor Ho held a joint appointment in the History Department, while Y.T. Wang and Shuichi Kato were full-time members of Asian Studies. There were also three teachers in other departments who were attached to the department as lecturers: Ross MacKay in Geography, Wayne Suttles in Anthropology, and Frank Langdon in Political Science, making a total of seven people as the Asian Studies Department.

There were, as well, courses in other departments which were part of the Asian scene at that time, seven to be exact. The titles of these courses indicated they were about "Asia," as if there were such a thing: Geography of Asia, Ethnography of East and South Asia, two courses in History of East and South Asia, and Oriental Art. This is an index of the level of understanding in the University at the time.

In his first year as head of department, Professor Holland's work had raised enrollment to 250 undergraduates and two graduate students. By 1968, when he resigned after seven years of work for the department, he had developed a staff of sixteen in the Asian Studies Department, including five full professors. There were also eight teachers from other departments who were listed as lecturers in Asian Studies, making a total team of twenty-four in Asian Studies. The undergraduate offerings had developed into three majors programmes and an honours, with nine courses in Chinese, four in Japanese, two in Sanskrit, and eighteen area courses in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. The total undergraduate enrollment was 573 students. There was also a flourishing graduate programme, with fourteen students enrolled

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in eleven graduate courses; and by now we have produced a dozen good M.A.'s.

Far more important, I believe, than these quantifiable achievements in building the department was the qualitative change that Bill brought in the University. To the task of building Asian Studies at UBC, Bill brought the clear idea that the problem was not simply an organizational one, was not simply a structural one of building a department: it was primarily one of raising the consciousness of the whole university concerning Asian studies. Bill's approach has always been one of encouraging the development of new events and new courses without being concerned that they should be part of his particular department. There is some difficulty in determining his specific contributions for he worked modestly and quietly to raise the general level of commitment within the university. For instance, he has been influential in encouraging departments to make appointments covering various areas of Asian studies and in developing their curriculum on these areas. When he came in 1961 there were only seven courses in the rest of the university, staffed by only five people who were specialists in Asian matters. When he resigned as head in 1968, there were twenty-nine such courses, and there were twenty-five members of faculty outside his department who were specialists on various areas of Asia. There were courses in philosophy, in religious studies, in fine arts, in theatre, in history, in political science, in music, anthropology, sociology, geography, economics, and linguistics.*

When Professor Holland came to UBC, he brought with him the IPR collection of books on Asia which made a valuable addition to the holdings in the University Library. He made his own personal collection the nucleus of a departmental library. For a department to have its own reading room was an innovation in the Faculty of Arts at UBC at that time, though it has since become a common practice. Professor Holland's coming to the university was important also in the field of publication, for the editorial office of *Pacific Affairs* became the nucleus of the UBC Press. He was a member of the UBC Senate for two years. His activities reached beyond the university, for he gave numerous public lectures through the Centre for Continuing Education, and organized symposia on Asian affairs not only in Vancouver but in other parts of the province as well.

By the time I arrived at UBC in 1966, these achievements were approaching fruition. The spectacular growth of Asian studies on the campus had brought new problems, and critical decisions had to be taken about the nature of the department and its relation to other departments in the Faculty of Arts, especially the social sciences. Should

*From a tribute to William L. Holland given at a Special Session of the Canadian Society for Asian Studies at the Annual Meeting at York University, May 25, 1973, and printed in the Society's Newsletter of January 1974.

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the department continue to include specialists in social science disciplines or should such activities be transferred to the discipline departments, leaving the Asian Studies Department to concern itself primarily with language and literature? It is a difficult problem that has been handled differently at different centres. The decision at UBC was to make the department responsible for language, literature and pre-modern history at the teaching level and to set up an Institute of Asian Research to bring together the specialists on Asia from all disciplines. Professor Holland naturally played a major role in organizing and setting up the Institute and was its Acting Director during its first two years of operation.

Another major achievement of these years was the founding of the Canadian Society for Asian Studies (recently renamed the Canadian Asian Studies Association after its amalgamation with Canadian Association for South Asian Studies). Professor Holland was not the only one involved in organizing the society, but he played a very major part in the long-drawn-out discussions that led up to the inaugural meeting at Guelph in the spring of 1969. These discussions were not without controversy and even acrimony at times, and Professor Holland's patience and diplomatic skill in reconciling opposing views were an important factor in bringing about the final happy result. It was fitting that he should become the society's first president.

Professor Holland resigned as head of the department in 1968 and retired as Professor in 1973. On this second occasion his departmental colleagues decided to commemorate his work for Asian studies at UBC by subscribing to continue the scholarship fund that he had started out of his own pocket to help deserving students, renaming it the William L. Holland Scholarship in Asian Studies.

After he retired from his administrative and teaching duties, Professor Holland continued to be active on the campus until July 1978 in his capacity of editor of *Pacific Affairs*. Though he has now given up his editorial duties as well, he remains a familiar and well-loved figure in the department and the university. As we move forward to face the new problems and opportunities of the eighties, we are still very much in need of his inspiration and example.

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