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*Anthropologists and
Their Traditions across
National Borders*

Histories of Anthropology Annual

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Anthropologists and Their Traditions across National Borders

Histories of Anthropology Annual, Volume 8

EDITED BY REGNA DARNELL
& FREDERIC W. GLEACH

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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

We begin by apologizing to our readers for the recent hiatus in publication of our ostensibly annual publication. *Histories of Anthropology Annual* began in the University of Nebraska book division and moved to the journals category after it had established reasonable visibility among anthropologists and historians. We discovered, however, that our readers are more inclined to buy single volumes than to subscribe. Thus we are returning to the book division. This has required rethinking and rescheduling, especially to accommodate the peer review process now in place through the Press in addition to the editors' review. We are confident that this will improve the quality of each issue and that the regular annual appearance of *HoAA* is sustainable into the foreseeable future.

Another important change is that each volume will now appear with a subtitle indicating something about the nature of its contents. Hence *Volume 8: Anthropologists and Their Traditions across National Borders*. We emphasize that this does not mean we are moving to thematic volumes. *HoAA* was established to provide a publication outlet across subject matters and approaches to history for specialists and for scholars whose primary interests lie elsewhere but who on occasion delve into historical questions of wider interest to the discipline. Volume 8 integrates fairly easily around how anthropologists' careers have intersected across different professional generations and allowed them to navigate national boundaries and national traditions. The essays are partly biographical, moving from the iconic heroes of the discipline to their little known contemporaries. Authors often deal with the foundational relationship of anthropologists to the people(s) they study. In each previous volume, while consciously encouraging the greatest possible diversity, we have in practice been startled by recurrent patterns as we juxtapose the scholarship of diverse contributors. Hence-

forth, we will make this explicit at the point of assembling a volume, rather than seeking out integrated themes in advance.

Likewise we have sought variation in genres of historical writing. Lindy-Lou Flynn's meticulous documentation of the teaching styles of two quite different undergraduate mentors offers an informal and deeply personal commentary about professional socialization. Simultaneously, the paper provides a fascinating glimpse of how a British-trained social anthropologist and a First Nations cultural anthropologist coexisted as departmental colleagues and were perhaps not as far apart as a more abstract treatment might suggest. We continue to be open to reflexive memoir and oral history materials from or about anthropologists as well as to more conventional research articles.

National traditions dominate volume 8, but these traditions refuse to stay in their separate boxes. Anthropologists working in the Americanist tradition will be aware of Boas's Jesup expedition foray into Asian ethnography, whereas Laurel Kendall explores Berthold Laufer's Chinese work and its abortive anthropological context at the American Museum of Natural History, which has been largely forgotten. Several papers trace the British national tradition through its far-flung geographical distribution: Charles Laughlin reexamines the comparative ethnographic approach of A. M. Hocart, which was eclipsed in its own time by the reputations of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski. Mark Lamont places Malinowski squarely within British colonialism and attributes the success of his functionalism to its administrative utility in dealing with the "native question." Another guise of functionalism, Radcliffe-Brown's "applied anthropology," was tested at the far ends of empire during his appointments at Sydney, Australia, and Cape Town, South Africa; Ian Campbell demonstrates that British social anthropology was not a position confined to or developed solely within the British Isles. Geoffrey Gray and Doug Munro continue their institutional documentation of anthropology in Australia and New Zealand as they skip ahead in time to 1957 and the politics of filling S. R. Nadel's chair at Australian National University after his sudden death the previous year.

Three short papers, best read as a set, assess the legacy of structuralism not long after the death of Claude Lévi-Strauss, its founder and most distinguished anthropological proponent. Regna Darnell

emphasizes the interplay between culture-specific pattern and cognitive universals in the widespread empirical exemplars of kinship, myth, and language. Abraham Rosman and Paula Rubel focus on the application of Lévi-Strauss's structuralist method to the classificatory systems of the North Pacific Coast, where Boas established an ethnographic database that has become iconic for the discipline. Michael Asch assesses Lévi-Strauss's claim to have accessed universal mental structures in his renditions of history, tying the French anthropologist to the European philosophical traditions usually outside the sphere of attention of practicing anthropologists. The death of the major figure in a theoretical school of thought offers the disciplinary historian a unique opportunity to stand back and take stock. These papers begin to define the ongoing legacy.

Lars Rodseth contextualizes the complex career of Marshall Sahlins, albeit further surprises may yet come from this contemporary maverick across national traditions and theoretical debates. Sahlins's career has wended its way from renewed neo-evolution to Lévi-Straussian structuralism to an ambitious philosophical reworking of history in which cultural encounter figures as miscommunication at mythic epistemological levels whether in ancient Greece or the near-contemporary South Pacific.

Stay tuned for new twists on these and other issues in volume 9.

REGNA DARNELL

FREDERIC W. GLEACH

*Anthropologists and
Their Traditions across
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“China to the Anthropologist”

*Franz Boas, Berthold Laufer, and a Road Not
Taken in Early American Anthropology*

“I shall place the ethnography and archaeology of this country on an entirely new and solid basis, that I shall conquer China to the anthropologist. China no longer the exclusive domain of travelers and sinologists, both narrow-minded and one-sided in their standpoints and researches, China to all who have anthropological interests” (Laufer to Boas, 12 August 1903, 1903-13, DAA, AMNH). Thus did Berthold Laufer address his mentor, Franz Boas, the founding father of American anthropology, with a euphoric vision of future anthropological researches in China. A century later, Laufer has been eulogized as the premier Sinologist of his generation, best known for his studies on Han period ceramics (1909), jade (1912a), and ancient bronzes (1922) and a list of wide-ranging, original, erudite, and sometimes eccentric publications from Nestorian inscriptions (1911a) to singing crickets (1928), Chinese theater (1923) to Chinese hermaphrodites (1920), with historical reconstructions of the introduction of vaccinations (1911b), corn (1907) and tobacco (1924) into East Asia.¹ His association with American anthropology, indeed the very existence of an early anthropological project in China, is largely forgotten. As an anthropology graduate student, I found Laufer’s name on a course syllabus, an article on the origin of the word “shaman” (Laufer 1917), but did not recognize him as one of our own, much less a protégé of Franz Boas, whose students included nearly all the luminaries of early twentieth-century American anthropology (Handler 1990). Maurice Freedman’s summation of the history of China anthropology makes no mention of Laufer, describing China anthropologists as relative latecomers to the discipline (Freedman 1979).

Boas biographies give, at best, passing mention to the Jacob H. Schiff expedition that sent Laufer to China.² Douglas Cole notes that the “Chinese enterprise” was part of a major project that loomed large in Boas’s AMNH years (1999:207–208, 287). George W. Stocking Jr. observes that Boas “worked rather hard” to raise funds from the business community and “capitalize on public interest in the Far East,” suggesting that this was something of a temporary fall from grace (Stocking 1974:285). Stanley A. Freed’s recent history of anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History devotes less than two pages to Laufer and the Schiff expedition in contrast with two full chapters devoted to the Jesup North Pacific expedition, which preceded it (Freed 2012:310–311). John Baick (1998: 24–83) describes Boas’s efforts in the business community as part of a social history of New York elites around 1900 and their brief infatuation with Asia.³ John Haddad (2006) and Roberta Stalberg (1983) give descriptive accounts of Laufer’s activities in China and Boas’s support of it; Steven Conn (1998:80–81) makes passing reference to the global reach of Boas’s ambitions.⁴ Regna Darnell (1998:160) notes Boas’s attempts to broaden the geographic scope of anthropology at Columbia by conscripting Laufer to teach there. But no one has yet considered this project as part of a larger Boasian vision of what American anthropology might be or become, an anthropology that from the moment of its professionalization would have been cognizant of “peoples with history” (cf. Wolf 1982). The full import of the Boas-Laufer collaboration is lost in a disciplinary might-have-been, an anthropology that might just possibly have sidestepped its now very dated (but in popular culture tenacious) association with the study of “simple societies” and “primitive peoples.”

Boas envisaged a major Asian Studies enterprise with New York City as its hub, collaboration between the American Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Columbia University with Berthold Laufer as the premier anthropologist in the mix. The story of this failed enterprise and its subsequent consignment to the dustbin of disciplinary history is worth revisiting because it cuts against the grain of what we think we know about early American anthropology, a history that, with few exceptions (e.g., Oppenheim 2005), has not considered East Asia as part of the story.

Critiques of early anthropology and of anthropological collecting as its salient enterprise have assumed, following Stocking's assertion, that "anthropology through most of its history has been primarily a discourse of the culturally or racially despised" (1985:112) and Clifford's description of the western museum as a colonial contact zone "usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (1997:192). Yes, in 1900, Chinese residents of the United States were counted among the "racially despised," and Boas was supremely cognizant of this, but he worked "rather hard" in another direction. Boas described the work of collecting and exhibiting as a means of impressing upon the general public "the fact that our people are not the only carriers of civilization, but that the human mind has been creative everywhere" (quoted in Jacknis 1985:107). Boasian humanism was very far from an Orientalist act of collecting and representing as an assertion of "European superiority over Oriental backwardness" (Said 1978:7), imperialism's "imagined ecumene" (Clunas 1997:414–415; Breckenridge 1989:196), or, as was the case with most other foundational anthropological collections, a hierarchical demonstration of cultural achievement with western civilization at the apex (Conn 1998:90). China in 1900 had been humiliated by a series of western incursions, acquiescing to a system of treaty ports to abet foreign commerce. When Laufer arrived in Beijing in December 1901, the foreign troops that had occupied the capital city in the aftermath of the Boxer Rebellion had only recently departed. But in contrast with prior anthropological subjects, the "China" of Boas's and Laufer's conversations was a still sovereign imperial power and a sophisticated "civilization" in the language of the day, a place that, in their thinking, the American public ought better to know and appreciate. "Respect" was a central concept in their project and conversations.

The Jacob C. Schiff expedition to China was a consequence of the meeting of two unique individuals, a soon-to-be-archaic style of anthropological fieldwork, and a particular historical moment. It rested on a wobbly triangulation of interest between Boas's humanistic regard for nonwestern cultures, his perception of the pragmatic interests of his potential backers, and Laufer, the brilliant but mercurial researcher in the field whose results were intended to seduce future support but

who also had his own research agendas. This is the story of an ambitious and ultimately failed project, what they set out to do, how Laufer tried to carry it out, and how it ended, with some speculations on the consequences of this failure for the discipline of anthropology.

THE PLAN

By 1901, when he dispatched Laufer to China, Boas was already developing the nascent anthropology program at Columbia. Along the way, he was also rethinking American anthropology as an intellectual commitment to cultural relativism, with the premise that all peoples have “cultures” of equal value independent of any social evolutionary ranking (Sanjek 1996). A visionary with a research agenda, Boas had already successfully convinced AMNH president Morris K. Jesup to fund the ambitious Jesup North Pacific expedition (1897–1902), five years of research by multiple teams of international scholars. With the official objective of proving that the Americas had been peopled via the Bering Strait, the expedition effectively garnered a huge resource base of object collections, physical and linguistic data, and published ethnographies, although its contribution to the Bering Strait question was negligible (Freed, Freed, and Williamson 1988; Krupnik and Vakhtin 2003). That Boas delayed in producing a synthesis of the expedition research with a definitive answer to the question of the peopling of the Americas would be a source of growing tension between him and Jesup, his primary backer. Jesup’s mounting impatience would cast a shadow over Boas’s efforts during and immediately after the Schiff expedition (Freed 2012:446–448).

As with the Jesup expedition, Boas’s plans for an anthropological enterprise in Asia were strategic and wide-ranging. With the conclusion of the Spanish American War in 1898, the United States gained possession of the Philippines, adding colonial interests in Asia to its already well-established commercial interests in China and Japan. Baick describes a critical moment when “a number of New York institutions made China and Japan a priority” (1998:2) and sought institutional support for cultural and scholarly projects—from museum collections to Chinese language instruction. This task required “convincing a broad cross-section of the city’s cultural leadership that ‘knowing’ East Asia

was a crucial step in the elevation of the city from a commercial center to a cosmopolitan capital” (Baick 1998:4). In this period, Boas articulated an urgent interest in creating both practical knowledge and cultural understanding of the subjects of the United States’ enlivened Pacific interests (East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files, DAA, AMNH). Like many a future academic seeking private or government funding to innovate, expand, or sustain an Asian studies program, Boas made his appeal on the grounds that professional knowledge of Asia was a necessary component of commerce and diplomacy. He observed that “special schools of Oriental culture, museums, and universities that include these subjects in the scope of their work” were already established in Paris, Berlin, and St. Petersburg, and he devoted a summer of European travel to visiting several of them and assessing their facilities with a practical eye toward creating a similar institution in New York (Boas to Schurz, 6 November 1901, East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files, DAA, AMNH).

In developing a language to justify this project, Boas tacked between the broad humanistic perspective of his own scholarship—the cultural relativism for which he is best-remembered today—and pragmatic appeals to the business interests of potential donors, as if the connections were seamless. In a report prepared for the Asiatic Committee, he stated that Laufer would make “collections which illustrate the popular customs and beliefs of the Chinese, their industries, and their mode of life” on the assumption that these collections “bring out the complexity of Chinese culture, the high degree of technical development achieved by the people, the love of art, which pervades their whole life, and the strong social ties that bind the people together. . . . These will demonstrate the *commercial and social possibilities* of more extended intercourse. We also wish to imbue the public with greater *respect* for the achievements of Chinese civilization” (Boas to Jesup, 27 December 1902, East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files, DAA, AMNH, my emphasis). This language appealed to Jacob Schiff (1847–1920), a New York banker and philanthropist with business interests in China who responded favorably to Boas’s appeal for funds to send Laufer to China: “Personally, I am much taken with your idea, for even without being a territorial expansionist, one can read-

ily see that if we wish to expand our commercial and industrial activities, we should know more than we do now of the customs . . . of the people with whom we desire to trade and come into closer contact” (Schiff to Boas, 24 December 1900, East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files, DAA, AMNH).⁵ Schiff provided \$18,000 for a three-year expedition.⁶ Boas considered the Schiff expedition the cornerstone of an ambitious edifice of East Asian scholarship. There would be a program of instruction at Columbia University emphasizing language, history, literature, cultural life, and commerce, a research library at Columbia, and museum collections for teaching, research, and public education at the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. AMNH would sponsor broad anthropological studies in Asia and use the resulting collections to introduce Asian cultures to an American popular audience.

In an age before the professionalization of institutional fund-raising, and with limited support from his own trustees for research, it was up to Boas to secure patronage for this and other projects (Jacknis 1985:83–84). With Jesup’s blessing, he engineered the creation of the East Asiatic Committee, a group of prominent businessmen and cultural figures with interests in Asia who would meet periodically at the American Museum of Natural History from 1900 to 1905. Jesup chaired the committee, and Boas himself was secretary and prime mover (East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files, DAA, AMNH; Baick 1998:24–83).⁷ Prospective members received this invitation:

Owing to the ever-increasing importance of the relations between America and the countries and peoples of eastern Asia, it is highly desirable that we should have a better knowledge of them. At the present time there is no place in the United States, in fact on the whole of this continent, where it would be possible to pursue studies in relation to eastern Asia. The experience of foreign countries, more particularly of Russia, France, and Germany, shows that the only method of attaining this object is to introduce the study of east Asiatic countries and civilizations. . . . Owing to the importance of foreign trade with New York, there ought to be no city in the United States in which an interest in the development of a knowledge of for-

eign countries should be keener. (Villard invitation, 11 April 1900, East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files, DAA, AMNH)

The appeal is practical, urgent, and with just a hint of a competitive edge in its evocation of “the experience of foreign countries,” a well-crafted pitch.

The Committee would include financiers, bankers, railway magnates, the president of Columbia University, a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the leader of an association of patrician art aficionados. The agenda was clear: convince potentially sympathetic leaders of the business community that it was in their common interest to develop university and museum resources for both specialist and public knowledge of Asia. Reference to “the ever-increasing importance of our intercourse with eastern Asia,” to the need for better knowledge of those who live there, and to New York’s prominence in foreign trade appear with mantra-like frequency in Boas’s solicitations (East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files, DAA, AMNH).

Throughout the work of the Committee, Boas was emphatic that the China expedition was just the beginning of a larger Asian studies enterprise, more than “simply making an interesting museum collection . . . we are trying to work towards a more far-reaching plan. . . . [A] foundation must be laid particularly in India and in China” (Boas to Schiff, 31 January 1901, East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files, DAA, AMNH). He had been incubating this idea for some years, exchanging Native American artifacts for material from the Dutch East Indies (Accession file 1898–50, DAA, AMNH), enlisting missionaries as museum collectors (Hasinoff 2010)—most successfully C. C. Vinton in Korea (Accession files 1901–78, 1908–32, DAA, AMNH)—and seizing upon opportunistic circumstance, as when Bashford Dean, on a zoological expedition to Japan, collected Ainu material in Hokkaido (Accession file 1901–77, DAA, AMNH). Laufer also collected Japanese material en route to and from his Siberian fieldwork for the Jesup expedition (Accession file 1898–36, DAA, AMNH). As an intended sequel to Laufer’s project, Boas developed a research strategy for “pretty thorough work in the Malay Archipelago” (Boas to Jesup, 15 March 1901, East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files,

DAA, AMNH), drafted a prospectus, located a potential scholar to carry out the work, and continued to beat the drum for the project in his correspondence with members of the Asiatic Committee throughout the Committee's existence (East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files, DAA, AMNH). In China, Laufer was also cognizant of the larger enterprise, writing to Boas of his encounter with a Mr. Unger, based in Yokohama, who can commission “some Japanese” to make a collection on the Luchu (Ryukyu) Islands (Laufer to Boas, 7 March 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH). He reports a meeting with Dr. Reid, a missionary based in Seoul, who spoke “about a curious kind of very ancient crude pottery recently excavated around Seoul” and “asked him to secure some of such pieces for the museum” (Laufer to Boas, 19 September 1901, 1901-69, DAA, AMNH).

AMNH's leadership in this project might have ensured a prominent place for anthropology in the development of American thinking about East Asia and made East Asia visible in the imagination of an emergent anthropology, but it was an anthropology that would soon become something else. In the early years of the twentieth century, anthropology was still a material as much as an ethnographic enterprise and fieldwork took the natural science expedition as its model, what James Clifford has called “a sensorium moving through extended space” (1997:69). Never anywhere for very long, anthropological expeditionists would make observations of social life, take physical type measurements, photographs, and head casts, record songs and stories on wax cylinders, and make what were described as “comprehensive” collections of the material culture of those whom they encountered, measured, photographed, and recorded. Early professional anthropology, in kinship with the natural sciences, was an enterprise grounded in material evidence (Edwards 1992; Jacknis 1985, 1996), “specimens,” “artifacts,” texts, vocabulary lists, and physical measurements that could be worked up at leisure once the expedition was completed, a “thingishness” congenial to museum environments even as nineteenth-century social evolutionists worked comfortably inside natural history museums (Gosden and Larson 2007) and as physical anthropologists and archeologists still do. Ethnographic collecting loomed large in Boas's appeals to the Asiatic Committee. He saw the China collection financed by Schiff, “although

complete in itself,” as “only the first step toward a much larger undertaking” (Boas to Jesup, 7 January 1901, East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files, DAA, AMNH). The materials that Laufer sent back from China would have to convince the Committee of the practical value of scholarly research, collecting, and documentation. These were the stakes.

THE EXPEDITIONIST

Berthold Laufer (1874–1934) was an unlikely anthropologist. He had been a student of Oriental languages at the University of Berlin, earned a doctorate in philology from the University of Leipzig by the age of twenty-three, and had already studied Persian, Sanskrit, Pali, Malay, Chinese, Japanese, Manchu, Mongolian, Dravidian, and Tibetan from some of the greatest scholars of the day (Latourette 1936:49). Owing to Laufer’s extraordinary linguistic skills, Boas commissioned him in 1897 for fieldwork among the peoples of Sakhalin and the Amur River in the Russian Far East (eastern Siberia) as part of the Jesup expedition. In retrospect, it is surprising that Boas would have sent to Siberia a budding European savant whose explorations into Asian cultures had theretofore been conducted in the rarefied air of a German university. Laufer’s background was not unlike Boas’s own, an assimilated German Jewish intellectual who had come to anthropology via a circuitous path. Boas had initially trained in physics, but had turned to geography and a stint of fieldwork with the Inuit on Baffin Island which turned him to ethnography (Baick 1998:32–33; Cole 1983; Sanjek 1996: 72). Still, one misses the logic of Boas’s assertion that “Dr. Laufer had devoted himself to the study of the Tibetan language and of the history of Asiatic cultures, and was well prepared to take up the problems offered by the Amur tribes” (Boas 1903:93–94). Even so, Laufer flourished in the field, working among the Ainu and Gilyak (Nivkh) of Sakhalin and the Gold (Nanai) of the Amur River region. He zealously collected objects and made wax cylinder recordings, but showed much less enthusiasm for photographic documentation or for taking the head and body measurements that were a component of turn-of-the-century anthropological practice. The plaster required for head casts seemed always to miss him at the last stop (Accession File 1900-12, DAA, AMNH; Kendall 1988).

In Siberia, Laufer had proven himself to be a comprehensive collector gifted with an aesthetic eye. As an ethnographer, however, his contribution to the Jesup expedition was thin: an aptly named publication of “Preliminary Notes” in *American Anthropologist* (1900) and a lavishly illustrated monograph on *The Decorative Art of the Amur Tribes* (1902) wherein he decoded textile patterns in the manner of arcane glyphs. The peripatetic expedition style, intended for a comprehensive survey of the vast culture area that spanned the Bering Strait, did not foster the extended, in-depth observation and deep linguistic competence that would be expected of subsequent generations of anthropologists.⁸ In China, Laufer would meld his experience of expedition anthropology, acquired in the trenches of Siberian fieldwork, with the Sinological erudition he had acquired in Berlin, but he would continue to work in the expedition model. Significantly, and in contrast with most other ethnographic terrains circa 1900, China was also a place where Laufer, trained as a textual scholar, could purchase books that had been written, published, and read by some of his ethnographic subjects or their ancestors—significant collections of old and rare volumes that he was charged to purchase for the American Museum of Natural History and Columbia University (Edgren 1984, 1991).

Laufer’s prior training in philology colored his approach to fieldwork. Commenting on the proofs of Laufer’s Amur River textile monograph, Boas had chided him for relying overmuch on his own interpretations and for failing to distinguish them from local knowledge recorded in the field (Boas to Laufer, 25 October 1901, 1901-69, DAA, AMNH). In reply, Laufer maintained that “all explanations obtained by natives are merely fragmentary and must be put together into a whole by us like the pieces of a broken jar” (Laufer to Boas, 27 November 1901, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH). As an extension of his interest in ancient and exotic scripts, Laufer seemed sometimes to regard the material world as signs to be decoded and wide-ranging etymologies to be traced.⁹ In China, he speculated that “shields of the Malayan tribes, including the so-called demon-shields of the Dayak of Borneo, derived from Chinese shields as still used in [the] 18th century” (Laufer to Boas, 11 January 1903, 1903-13, DAA, AMNH). In describing to Boas the “very curious representation of birds, fishes, insects, and other animals” on a collec-

tion of Chinese kites he had purchased during the lunar New Year, he suggested “a strange resemblance of this ornamentation to that of your friends in British Columbia, as set forth in your paper on the decorative art of the North Pacific Coast” (Laufer to Boas, 1 March 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH). With an echo of his earlier contempt for the limitations of native knowledge, he wrote from Nanjing, explaining to Boas why he could not provide adequate documentation on the enormous puppet collection he had assembled, citing the limitations of his puppeteer informant and of informants more generally:

The oral statements of the people are all superficial and unreliable, generally speaking, [and] as all their knowledge is derived from written sources, we have, of course, to look up literature to verify their statements. I do not think it wise, therefore, to give designations for these figures for labeling before I have gone through the subject in detail. I also hope you will understand . . . why I bought such a number of books. There is no oral tradition, and properly speaking, no folklore in China; everything is literature and art. The books which I bought ought to be considered as the text-books illuminating and explaining the collection and to form together with these an inseparable unit. (Laufer to Boas, 7 March 1903, 1903-13, DAA, AMNH)

For Laufer, texts contained the key to an antiquarian China, “up to the fatal year 1900 . . . the only country where the life of antiquity was really still alive” (Laufer 1912b:137). It was a romance, but its logic was not so far from the work of other turn-of-the-century ethnographers who privileged precontact native cultures over the contemporary conditions of those they studied. Boasian anthropology was in its own way “textual”; Boas and his students produced “endless recordings of texts” of folklore and linguistic data (Freed 2012:301, 454) but with human encounters mediating the recording ethnographer and the desired myth or tale. Recording in the informant’s own words became a precept of Boasian anthropology where endangered native languages offered fragile windows on vanishing cultural knowledge (Darnell 1998:129, 186; 2001:11, 14). Laufer’s privileging of printed textual knowledge, on the other hand, would have been reinforced through his encounters with educated Chinese who similarly valued erudition and the authority of

classical texts: “received the visits of a number of scholars . . . had talks about Confucianism and the antiquities and famous paintings of the place” (Laufer to Boas, 9 November 1901, 1901-69, DAA, AMNH). And Laufer was not a modest man. He observed how the antiquities dealers knew nothing about the material they sold and how highly literate Chinese matched his own difficulty in decoding inscriptions and seals. In Beijing he reported with obvious pride, “I have found out that I know more about Buddhism, its history and literature, than any Chinese monk or even Lama.” He bested the knowledge of his language tutor, a Lama who was instructor to the imperial family. “I could explain to him in his own language a number of terms which he never knew before, and tell him about books which he had never seen nor read” (Laufer to Boas, 14 March 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH).

While Laufer’s prior training led him in the direction of antiquarian research, Boas developed a plan for the China expedition in cognizance of the perceived interests of potential future backers on the Asiatic Committee. He listed, as the expedition’s first objective, a study of “the use of natural products by the people of eastern Asia, and manufactures based on such products, methods of manufacture, embracing the whole range of industrial life of the people [and their] consumption of manufactured products, illustrating the extent to which the various natural products and manufactured objects enter into the daily life of the people” (Laufer Expedition to China, MSS.E973, Library Special Collections Archives, AMNH). As part of this same plan, the expedition would document a cultural “China,” attentive to how science, technology, religion, and art were present in “the daily life of the people.” Boas’s outline for the work of the expedition reflected an appreciation of the historic depth, complexity, technological sophistication, and sheer enormity of “China,” but betrays naïve expectations of how much China could be caught within the net of a three-year expedition or embraced by the interest and energy of a single ethnographer, even one so gifted and versatile as Laufer.

Like the Jesup expedition (on the Siberia side), and in contrast with the shorter field “seasons” of anthropologists working with North American populations, the scope of the project was expeditionary, an extended period of fieldwork in a place not otherwise easily accessed,

Fig. 1. Laufer (rt.) in Hankou. Courtesy Field Museum, A98299.

a broad agenda, and a mobile engagement with the terrain. Boas was well aware of the difference between China and the small populations of hunters and gatherers, herders and horticulturalists who had theretofore been (and for much of the twentieth century would continue to be) regarded as anthropology's proper domain. But in accepting the idea of a historically and temporally unified China, he could com-

Fig. 2. AMNH 70/10577. Paper kite collected by Laufer, “a strange resemblance of this ornamentation to that of your friends in British Columbia.”

mit the ethnographic sleight-of-hand of rendering the Qing Empire the lexical equivalent of the Kwakiutl¹⁰ or the Koryak. In his “Plan of Operations” he argued, “Since the culture of China is, on the whole, uniform, owing to the centralization of government, the collections do not require elaborate subdivisions, except in so far as the historical influences which molded Chinese culture must be considered” (5 February 1901, East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files, DAA, AMNH).¹¹ Boas, probably in consultation with Laufer, added the possibility that the research would include “the important culture of Tibet . . . and the life of the Miao-tse [Miao]” (5 February 1901, East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files, DAA, AMNH). In China, Laufer soon realized that these geographic ambitions were overblown. His correspondence reveals a practical awareness of regional diversity within China and the difficulties of working through several local dialects, even in the Chinese heartland (e.g., 31 May 1903, 1903-13, DAA, AMNH). He reluctantly abandoned his own plans to extend his research into Central Asia, owing to lack of funds (Laufer to Boas, 1 March 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH).

But if Boas described China as a place of extraordinary cultural unity over time and space, Laufer’s China was far from homogenized (Laufer 1912b.). Intellectually omnivorous, he pursued diverse historical evidence, perusing stone inscriptions in Chinese, Manchu, Mongol, Tibetan, Sanskrit, Turkish, and Arabic, and acquiring old books and rubbings as opportunities arose throughout his travels (Laufer to Boas, 10 April 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH). He collected Tibetan tangka paintings and masks for tantric liturgical dramas and supplemented his growing library with texts on borderland peoples.¹² China’s ethnically complex past continued to tantalize him, as when he suggested that a future trip might involve research in the homeland of the eleventh- and twelfth-century Xi Xia (Tangut) Kingdom in the far northwest of China (Laufer to Boas, 18 May 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH).

Despite the limitations of time, space, and money, Laufer’s sense of ethnographic mission was encyclopedic, straddling contemporary observations and antiquarian research. At the end of his fieldwork, he would propose twenty-one topics of future scholarly studies, “ample material for which is already collected.” These proposed projects ranged

from the Chinese Neolithic to bronzes to ancient and modern pottery to the influence of religious dances in the development of Chinese theater to Chinese representations of “foreign tribes” (Laufer to Boas, 8 July 1904, 1904-2, DAA, AMNH). Because Laufer’s primary task was to acquire and document collections that would be written up after his return to New York, he conducted his researches with great dispatch during his three years in China: Shanghai, an extended tour of Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces including Suzhou, Hangzhou, Ningbo, Putuoshan (in the East China Sea) and Haimen (in Jiangsu), then on to Beijing with trips to the Great Wall, the Ming Tombs, the imperial kilns, and Chengde (Jehol) in the Manchu homeland. He returned to Shanghai as a jumping off point for a journey to Nanjing and Hankou and eventually Xian, then back to Beijing, on to Shandong, and from Qingdao back to Shanghai before sailing from China in April 1904.

The frenetic pace of his work and the astonishing breadth of his interests are well witnessed in his letters to Boas. In Hangzhou, he fought the onset of a sudden and violent intestinal complaint by accelerated activity, ten hours on horseback during which he saw “all [the] remarkable places of interest . . . collected a large number of rubbings made from old temples inscriptions . . . obtained also historical materials regarding these interesting places of worship and recorded some traditions and legends told by the priests.” He adds, “The ride was, of course, very painful to me, as that disease is accompanied by a constant pricking heat and boiling in the bowels” (Laufer to Boas, 9 November 1901, 1901-69, DAA, AMNH).

Laufer did the wide-ranging work of an early twentieth-century anthropological expedition, generating material (including textual) and aural data for future research and future museum exhibitions. From Shanghai, he reported that he had made sixty-one recordings including two complete dramas with all songs and dialogues. “I engaged a band of female actors and took the plays on the stage of their theatre. I used two machines which were working at the same time, one for the orchestral music, the other one for the vocal music, so that the two cylinders are corresponding to each other” (Laufer to Boas, 27 September 1901, 1901-69, DAA, AMNH). The next month, in Suzhou, he commissioned the woodworkers at a Jesuit school to make models of a village,

Fig. 3. Laufer's hand-drawn map of his travels during the final segment of the Schiff expedition, American Museum of Natural History, Expedition to China Correspondence, 1900-1904, MSS.E973, AMNH Library Special Collections Archives.

a pagoda, and a temple. “They have worked up similar models for the Paris Exhibition, and what I have seen of their work is very satisfying” (Laufer to Boas, 12 October 1901, 1901-69, DAA, AMNH). In November 1901, back in Shanghai, he reported arrangements for photographing actors and musicians, locating an Italian who could make plaster casts, and commissioning a street scene carved out of wood according to his own detailed plan and reports.¹³ In addition, he wrote, “I am entering into negotiations with Chinese officials to obtain heads of executed criminals” (Laufer to Boas, 9 November 1901, 1901-69, DAA, AMNH). This would not have been the last time that Chinese officials trafficked in criminal body parts or that anthropologists brought skulls home from the field, but there is no record of either the projected criminal heads or the plaster casts having ever reached the Museum. The file does contain the following note: “Enclosed I beg to send you an X-ray photo taken from the crippled feet of a Chinese woman, which I hope may interest you to some degree. Yours very truly, B. Laufer” (Laufer to Boas, 28 February 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH).

Correspondence between Boas and Laufer reveals a shared and passionate sense of purpose in elevating western perceptions of China. Boas’s first report to the Asiatic Committee on Laufer’s progress would claim that “the material sent by Dr. Laufer is very valuable and attractive, and gives a fair insight into the great achievements that the Chinese have accomplished” (1 May 1901, East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files, DAA, AMNH). To Laufer himself he wrote, “You know perfectly well what we are driving at. It is to bring home to the public the fact that the Chinese have a civilization of their own, and to inculcate respect for the Chinese” (Boas to Laufer, 21 April 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH). A year later, this conviction verged on self-righteousness when Laufer tried to dissuade Boas from accepting, on Columbia’s behalf, the gift of a Kangxi encyclopedia from the Foreign Department of the Qing government. Laufer saw this as another instance of exploitation such as China had experienced in the aftermath of the recent Boxer Rebellion. Boas responded: “It is the ideal aim of our work to change . . . public opinion towards the Chinese, and anything that we may be able to contribute in this direction is a service rendered to China. From this point of view we have the right

to utilize all the influence that we can possibly get in China in order to further our ends" (Boas to Laufer, 23 April 1903, DAA, AMNH). Back in New York, Boas was struggling, unsuccessfully, to persuade the Eastern Asiatic Committee to include in its membership "one or two wealthy and influential Chinese who live in this city" (Boas to Ford, 7 March 1903, East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files, DAA, AMNH). The archive contains no response; the appeal seems to have fallen on deaf ears.

For his part, Laufer derided the "silly prejudices" of the "white residents of this place [Shanghai]. . . . The deeper the narrow mindedness of foreign residents, the higher is the intelligence of the Chinese who show a much better understanding for the character of my work" (Laufer to Boas, 30 August 1901, 1901-69, DAA, AMNH). Toward the end of his time in China he wrote, "The Chinese culture is in my opinion just as good as ours and in many things far better, especially in practical ethics. [If] I regret something it is not having been born a Chinese" (Laufer to Boas, 3 June 1903, 1903-13, DAA, AMNH).

VICISSITUDES OF COLLECTING

While Boas was secure in Laufer's sense of common purpose, they did not always see eye to eye regarding other aspects of the fieldwork, and their correspondence during the Schiff expedition sometimes erupts in mutual expressions of frustration. These altercations have been interpreted as a conflict between Boas's ethnographic agenda and Laufer's interests in art and antiquarian pursuits (Freed 2012:310; Haddad 2006; Stalberg 1983:38). This, however, misses the full charge of Laufer's mission and Boas's stake in it. Boas did sometimes find it necessary to curb Laufer's raptures over antique paintings and ancient bronze drums, reminding him to not "give undue prominence to Chinese art" and to always keep in mind that from the perspective of the Anthropology Department and the Museum, "the most important point is always the significance of an object in the cultural life of the people, and the use to which a work of art is put or the ideas which it represents" (Boas to Laufer, 3 February 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH). A close reading of the correspondence suggests not that Laufer shorted his ethnographic project—work in which he engaged from nearly the moment of his

arrival in China—but that he was not fulfilling a more specific and challenging mission to document Chinese handicraft industries and acquire the tools of production.

Collecting technology was high on the agenda of early field anthropology, initially as evidence for different stages of cultural evolution (Gosden and Larson 2007). While Boas is credited with turning the course of American anthropology away from cultural evolutionist models and pursuits, Jacknis describes how, consistent with his characteristic relativism, Boas felt that “manufactures would be improved by the exposure of craftsmen to the accumulated heritage of the world’s cultures” (Jacknis 1985:87). It seems also to have been standard practice at AMNH to ask collectors for full sets of tools and materials in order to illustrate the production of characteristic crafts, “a piece of the cloth partly woven on the loom; also specimens of the grass itself” (Putnam to James, 20 March 1898, 1898-17, DAA, AMNH). However, in the case of China and in contrast with virtually everywhere else that AMNH had theretofore collected, handicrafts were produced at a high level of sophistication; they had long been consumed as decorative art in American and European homes and exhibited in world’s fairs and other venues (Clunas 1997; Conn 2000; Rydell 1987). Detailed information on Chinese manufactures was the piece of the project most likely to entice potential backers on the East Asiatic Committee.

After receiving Laufer’s first shipment of objects, Boas expressed his disappointment: “In collecting the material illustrating industries, please do not forget to obtain everything that is required in making the various objects; for instance, all the implements used in making the matting that you sent us, embroidery-frames and needles, carving-knives for wood-work, etc. . . . You must lay just as much stress on the technical side as on the artistic, social, and religious sides” (Boas to Laufer, 21 January 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH). This theme would be struck, with varying degrees of emphasis, specificity, and conciliation throughout Boas’s correspondence with Laufer in the field. One month after the previous directive he prodded Laufer again: “So far, your collections contain very little showing, for instance, the whole industrial side of weaving, embroidery, basketry, wood-carving,—all classes of objects represented in your collection. We ought to have samples of the vari-

ous kinds of fabrics, thread, embroidery-silks, dyes, spinning apparatus, loom[s], etc.; and not only for this industry, but for others as well,—agriculture, wood work, metal-work, leather-work, lacquer-work, etc.” (Boas to Laufer, 3 February 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH). By April 1903, at the start of Laufer’s last year in China, Boas’s impatience was acute:

You ought, for instance, to obtain for us the agricultural implements used in the cultivation of rice, the agricultural implements used in raising cotton and other products. You ought to make a collection of the ordinary every-day bamboo things,—a subject which you yourself referred to in one of your letters. You ought to illustrate the manufacture of paper, the preparing of skins, stone-cutting, the manufacture of glass, spinning, and a selection of some of the thousands of industries that are important in the daily life of China. . . . You will readily see that all the series which you have sent us are very special; and with the collections that you have made so far, we are not able to illustrate adequately the ordinary industries of China. (Boas to Laufer, 13 April 1903, 1903-13, DAA, AMNH)

A few days later, responding to pressure at AMNH, Boas waxed even more emphatic, implying that Laufer’s future prospects in New York and Boas’s own larger Asian project depended upon the documentation of local industries:

[T]he whole development of your vast Asiatic work depends upon your strictest compliance with this request. Every time the matter of the East Asiatic work comes up, it is again and again brought forward that what the committee wants to do is to exhibit the products and consumption of the Chinese people. We want the agricultural implements. You ought to collect as much as you can bearing upon the silk industry, beginning with raising the silkworms to the manufacture of the silk. You ought to get specimens illustrating the carpentry-work, building, manufacture of porcelain, etc. . . . What you have done up to this time is altogether too special and too fragmentary. (Boas to Laufer, 24 April 1903, 1903-13, DAA, AMNH)

In October 1903, well into Laufer’s final year in China, Boas offered one last prod to the recalcitrant Laufer, noting that having unpacked

most of the material that Laufer sent and placed it in cases, he was struck “more forcefully than ever before” by the paucity of industrial material.

On the home front, Boas was under pressure to show results, both with respect to the promised synthesizing monograph on the Jesup expedition and for Laufer’s continuing researches. By 1902, Jesup had even suggested that Laufer receive no further support, owing to the disappointing nature of his collections (Freed 2012:448). Boas was operating in a less congenial climate than had theretofore blessed his projects. His aging patron, Morris Jesup, began to defer administrative matters to the far less sympathetic director, Hermon Bumpus, and was no longer providing financial support for ambitious research and publication projects, a situation that would ultimately result in Boas’s resignation from AMNH in 1905 (Cole 1999:235, 241, 244–248; Haddad 2006; Freed 2012:446–456). For his part, Laufer alternated between enthusiastic reports of the progress of his collecting and frustrated attempts to explain to Boas why it was so difficult to document handicraft industries in China.

When he went to China, Laufer’s primary interests were textual and historical. His correspondence recounts work with a succession of tutors, visits to temples and historic sites, and his relentless acquisition of rubbings of historical inscriptions. In Beijing, in order to work uninterrupted with his tutor, he turned over the task of documenting a significant puppet collection to an unreliable assistant who allegedly made off with some of the puppets (Laufer to Goodnow, 12 August 1903, 1903-13, DAA, AMNH). In June 1902, making another promise to Boas to “stick to the plan as developed by you,” he confessed to confusion about how to proceed and admitted “that the work of collecting does not always coincide with my scientific aims, and there is necessarily a dilemma between these two agents, which sometimes exclude one another entirely. Now, after a long fight, I have arrived at last at a compromise between those two hostile powers” (Laufer to Boas, 20 June 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH).

But Laufer also struggled to impress upon Boas the particular difficulty of documenting the highly developed and often jealously protected techniques of Chinese handicraft production, underscoring the differences between collecting such material in China and the museum

anthropologist's common practice of obtaining tools and materials from the local weavers, potters, or woodcarvers encountered in other field-work. Far from simply "going shopping," it required special ordering, which demanded "a good deal of nerves, the self-control of a god, and an angel's patience" over many cups of tea and gaining trust "before starting into real business. . . . All conditions of life and work are entirely different here from those in Japan, Siberia, or America" (Laufer to Boas, 28 February 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH). He elaborates in subsequent correspondence:

The man who sells the embroideries is not the same as the maker, and the maker is not the same as the man who makes the needles, thread, or frames or other instruments, and so with all objects. (Laufer to Boas, 10 March 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH)

You will hardly believe how many hours and days and even weeks one has to run about to hunt up such and such a thing, and at last, even if you have ordered it to be made, you will be disappointed at ever getting it. (Laufer to Boas, 18 May 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH)

Laufer soon realized that among the producers of skilled and elegant handicraft, "the Chinese manufacturers have their own secrets like our own people and are not willing to betray them" (Laufer to Boas, 10 March 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH). Owners of local industries "are suspicious of foreigners. . . . People really fear we might imitate their work at home, and it requires an Iliad of speeches in each and every case to convince them of the contrary" (Laufer to Boas, 20 June 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH).

If industrial spying was a hidden agenda of the Asiatic Committee, Laufer was not cut out to be an industrial spy. In the spring of 1902, writing from Beijing, he had confessed his own limitations: "Subjects like weaving silk and cotton industry, agriculture and a number of other technicalities are entirely foreign to me and there is hardly anybody . . . [who can] master them all. . . . I cannot buy or order things which I do not understand" (Laufer to Boas, 10 March 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH). After a heated exchange in the spring of 1902 and renewed promises to do his best, he reported in August a successful visit to an impe-

rial brick kiln where he was permitted to observe the entire process of manufacture and was presented with several specimens (Laufer to Boas, 2 August 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH). In May 1903, during a stint in Hankou, he reported that he had “particularly enjoyed the work of the ironsmiths.” He was also finding ways to combine his textual interests with the collecting project. Having studied “the whole domain of agriculture according to the illustrated works of Chinese literature,” he said, “I shall surely make a collection as complete as possible in this line” (Laufer to Boas, 31 May 1903, 1903-13, DAA, AMNH). In June 1903, however, collecting in Hankou, he again felt called upon to offer yet another explanation for both the complexity and confidentiality surrounding major Chinese manufactures:

Take silk, for example. It would be necessary to live in a silk district for at least one year so as to observe all the stages of mulberry trees, the caterpillars, etc. The working of the silk industry takes place somewhere else. If of value, such collections can only be pursued by a silk expert. . . . I made inquiries about the porcelain manufacture to illustrate [that] it is out of the question. At present the only factory is imperial property located in King-te-chen [Jingdezhen] on the Yangtse [Yangtze]. The production is a carefully guarded secret, and a European can hardly expect to gain admittance. Repeatedly foreigners have been driven away from there. You remember that I was refused any industrial artifacts from the imperial brick factory in Peking, and the same thing is likely to happen at the porcelain factory if not worse. Travelling in these regions is complicated and tedious and I don’t feel like . . . [going there and being] taken for a fool. (Laufer to Boas, 3 June 1903, 1903-13, DAA, AMNH)

In his remaining months in China, perhaps effectively shaken by the urgent tone of Boas’s correspondence and aware that the clock was ticking, Laufer did make a significant effort to document handicraft industries. On his return to Beijing in September 1903, he immediately decamped for a six-day residence in a village at the foot of Beijing’s eastern hills, interviewing farmers and blacksmiths and managing to make observations and collections at a nearby tile kiln (23 October 1903, 1903-13, DAA, AMNH). Back in the city he “made a special study of

modern pottery and all metal industries, iron, copper, brass, tin, pewter, silver, and various others" (4 March 1904, 1904-2, DAA, AMNH). Boas had secured another behest enabling Laufer to make collections and studies of the ceramics industry near Beijing, from Po-shan in Shandong, and in Yixing on the Yangtze. But even during his self-described "winter campaign" in Shandong, where ceramics and glass production loomed large in his intentions, he managed to simultaneously pursue his own research interests. "I found more than twenty-five new stone sculptures in relief of the Han Dynasty which were heretofore unknown to Chinese epigraphists as well as to foreign scholars. I have paper rubbings of them. Still more important is the discovery of Mongolian inscriptions in these different places where nobody would search for them nor anybody ever found them" (Laufer to Boas, 10 February 1904, 1904-2, DAA, AMNH).

Early in 1904, perhaps encouraged by Laufer's progress, Boas expressed optimism about the future of the East Asian project and remained steadfast in his commitment to Laufer's continuing role in it: "My dear Laufer . . . I do not need to tell you how much I desire and wish to keep you here in New York and how ardently I hope for your assistance in developing the study of Oriental subjects in this country. Your point of view and my own coincide so happily, that I am certain that each in his proper field can do much towards bringing about a just appreciation of the achievements of a foreign race" (Boas to Laufer, 11 January 1904, 1904-2, DAA, AMNH). On February 10, Boas was able to inform Laufer of his likely appointment as assistant ethnologist whose duties would include cataloguing the Schiff expedition collection, arranging a public exhibition, and teaching the ethnology of China at Columbia University, an appointment confirmed a month later in a letter from AMNH director Hermon Bumpus (4 March 1904, 1904-2, DAA, AMNH).

CHINA FOR THE SINOLOGIST?

Laufer, the ultimate polymath, had balked at the broad expectations of Boas's agenda when they ran counter to his interests, temperament, and most important, his recognition of the incompatibility between the agendas of early expedition anthropology and the reality of docu-

Fig. 4. Carpenters in Beijing. Laufer Scrapbook, AMNH Library Special Collections Archives, neg. # 33610.

menting jealously protected handicraft industries in imperial China, a society with complex craft and art specializations. Recent and careful research on Chinese handicrafts has confirmed Laufer's instincts; these are domains of complex embodied knowledge and subtle interactions between the artisan, the user, the natural and social world, and a complex and historically contingent regime of production and distribution (Bray 1997; Eyferth 2009). The flying surveys of expeditionary anthropology were ill-suited to more than a passing acquaintance with sophisticated handicraft production. Even so, and despite all the misgivings that he had expressed to Boas, Laufer would observe, "If the manufacturers of this country [the United States] had taken the trouble to study the native industries of the Chinese and their products in museum collections with a view to adapting our manufactures to their peculiar needs, American business with China would have assumed much larger dimensions" (Laufer 1912b:138).

His unpublished guide to the exhibit he mounted at the AMNH after his return reveals a fidelity to the objectives of the exhibition, to document industries and patterns of consumption and to inculcate respect

Fig. 5. AMNH 70/2490. Cloisonné vase collected by Laufer in Beijing where he was able to document the entire casting and enameling process.

for his Chinese subject. The guide includes brief notes on such object-related topics as ceramic and glass making processes, plant fibers used in textile production, varieties of silk, cloisonné production, and blacksmithing. Visitors would see examples of the glazed Chinese wares that Boettger of Dresden had studied and eventually successfully reproduced. They would learn that after the fall of the Roman Empire, the most spectacular textiles came from the East and that familiar European patterns of dragons, griffons, and birds were influenced by Persian fabrics that copied Chinese motifs. Tin and silver ornaments were produced with creativity in endless variety to entice potential customers, an example to counter the common belief that Chinese artisans merely copy “things of the past.” An exhibit of embroidery would include steel needles as a markedly rare example of a western commodity that had successfully supplanted a Chinese tool (Laufer n.d.). Laufer’s celebratory presentation of Chinese handicraft past and present was far from the evolutionary displays of most contemporary museums and—in its referencing then-contemporary Chinese tastes and practices—far also from the strictly antiquarian exhibits that would dominate most museum presentations of China.

Had Laufer remained in Europe, he would undoubtedly have distinguished himself as a textual scholar. Had he gone to China by other means, he would probably also have enjoyed the conversations with Chinese scholars and antiquarians that he relates in his correspondence. But it is far less likely that he would have spent time in a rural village, at a pottery kiln, or in a cloisonné workshop. Boasian anthropology and his own polyglot curiosity had drawn him into a social and material encounter with late Qing China that was pulling his scholarship in multiple new directions. His report to Boas, after an ecstatic encounter with a living Buddhist tradition at Putuo Shan, suggests that even in the early months of fieldwork, he had begun to imagine contemporary observations and textual analysis as an integrated enterprise. He proposed a return to Putuo Shan after thoroughly studying (“in my few hours of leisure”) the epigraphic and historical materials obtained on this first trip to compare the results of literary investigation with reality “to obtain a perfectly reliable fact.” The resulting work would include a topographical description of the island, Chinese maps, his

own observations, a chapter on the goddess Kwan Yin and the historical background of her worship, “the drama in which the story of her arrival . . . is performed together with a translation, musical notation of the songs, and descriptions of masks used in it,” the modern traditions of the place, the lives of the monks, pilgrimages, and recent developments (Laufer to Boas, 9 November 1901, 1901-69, DAA, AMNH). Many of us might regret that such a monograph was never completed, although Laufer did succeed in re-creating the ritual drama under exhibition glass at the Field Museum in Chicago. The scholarship through which Laufer would eventually gain renown also bears the mark of his early fieldwork in descriptions of how jade is mined, distributed, and worked (Laufer 1912a) or the similarities between Han ceramics and some early twentieth-century wares (Laufer 1909). His writing on Chinese theater draws upon his own familiarity with performance as well as text (Laufer 1923). When he returned from his first trip to China, he had begun to master a style of China scholarship uniquely his own and for which he would eventually be eulogized as an “ethnologist” for want of any better term (Latourette 1936).

But anthropology would soon take another turn.

OBLIVION, OR NEARLY SO

At the end of 1905, the East Asiatic Committee had run out of steam and voted to dissolve. Apart from Schiff’s generosity, Committee members’ contributions to Boas’s projects had been minimal, small subsidies for the collection of ceramics and smoking equipment. What is now arguably the most extensive ethnographic collection from pre-revolutionary China in North America had failed to impress them. The endeavor ended when Boas himself left the museum to teach full time at Columbia University. The precipitating cause was his nemesis, Director Bumpus, who had opposed a permanent appointment for Laufer and the kind of research-oriented fieldwork that had characterized both the Jesup and Schiff expeditions (17 May 1905, DAA, AMNH; Baick 1998:76–80; Cole 1999:243–248; Darnell 1998:142–147; Haddad 2006; Freed 2012). Boas’s prescient vision of an Asian studies that combined fieldworking anthropologists with textual scholars and sometimes imagined them in the same person would not be realized

for many more decades. Until the 1920s, North American anthropologists would work primarily in North America (Darnell 1998:160). Boas's successor at the Museum, Clark Wissler, defined the Anthropology Department as an "American department" with no space for continuing researches on China (Wissler to Lucas, 27 May 1912, East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files, DAA, AMNH). When Schiff attempted to revive plans to publish Laufer's guide to the China collection, already in edited proofs, Museum president Henry Fairfield Osborn took the decidedly pre-Boasian view that "the whole subject lies somewhat beyond the true field of the Museum of Natural History, which concerns itself only with the prehistoric cultures and races", an image that the discipline has long since tried to live down (Osborne to Schiff, 5 May 1911, East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files, DAA, AMNH). There was even correspondence with the Metropolitan Museum of Art with the aim of selling the China collection (Osborn to de Forest, 17 May 1911, Central Archives, 975, Special Collections Archives, AMNH).

After teaching Chinese at Columbia and holding an "assistant" position at AMNH, Laufer would join the staff of the Field Museum in 1908 and spend the rest of his career leading two more expeditions to China (Latourette 1936:44–45; Bronson 2006). Between 1908 and 1910 he would spend time in the Tibetan-speaking borderlands of western China, but he would fail in several attempts to reach Tibet itself (Bronson 2006). With the irony that history makes of youthful enthusiasms, Laufer in his disillusionment with Republican China would become the very model of an antiquarian, albeit a more wide-ranging and creative antiquarian than he might have been without his early anthropological adventure.

CONCLUSION

The history of American anthropology marks Boas's departure from AMNH as a critical disciplinary turning from the museum to the university and from museum collections to more abstract notions of "culture" (Conn 1998:102; Darnell 1998:149; Cole 1999:253–254; Jacknis 1985, 1996:205; Hegeman 1998), but East Asia and the study of complex state societies was also left behind in a neglected corner of the museum.

Fig. 6. AMNH 70/12870. Model of a potter's kiln, collected by Laufer.

Sixty years after the Schiff expedition, Maurice Freedman would critique the brief history of China anthropology, a story that, in his telling, began with village studies in the 1920s and 1930s. The authors of these studies engaged in participant observation through extended residence in and in-depth knowledge of a circumscribed community following Malinowski's model, an approach that has been broadly recognized for much of the twentieth century as "doing anthropology" (Clifford 1997). While Freedman valued the quality of information that deep participant observation produced, he faulted these efforts as narrow and limited, incapable of reaching beyond the well-examined village to a broader vision of Chinese society. But Freedman's 1979 history of China anthropology contained no memory of Laufer, who, if anything, had erred in the opposite direction. In the manner of assigning "proper names" (de Certeau 1984), what Laufer did was no longer recognized as anthropology and consequently forgotten. Freedman's comments on the brief history of China anthropology echo Eric Wolf's 1982 critique of the entire discipline in his *Europe and the People without History*, with its recognition that in their exquisite examination of microcosms, anthropologists had generally ignored the integration of their subjects into larger social, political, and economic systems. It is

worth resurrecting the story of Boas's failed East Asian project now that Freedman's own summation has become history. Freedman's call for a new anthropology of China assumed the sort of area studies training, including cultural and historical literacy, that most practicing anthropologists of East Asia receive today.¹⁴ The "area studies" moment has itself passed, but not without leaving a broader and more historically proficient anthropology in its wake.

Many of the topics that Laufer pursued—the tension between text and social practice, the importance of non-Han peoples in the larger "Chinese" mix, and the global traffic in goods and ideas—are matters of no small interest today. Laufer's studies of the circulation of such things as tobacco, maize, and textile motifs can be read as harbingers of our contemporary cognizance of global systems. Material culture studies have returned in a new incarnation and "multi-sited" ethnographies are considered valuable ways of recording mobile subjects and the things they make and consume (just don't call these projects "expeditions"). One can read the eclipse of this small chapter in the history of early American anthropology as a mistaken overinvestment in a soon to be outdated research model, a loss of nerve on the part of the intellectual community, a nadir in institutional politics, or a consequence of the risky business of marketing an academic enterprise, something many of us find ourselves doing from time to time. One possible reading is a cautionary tale about the sometimes irreconcilable expectations that freight many visionary enterprises, inside museums and out. What would anthropology have been like had it been able to digest Laufer and China into the twentieth-century mix? Could we have gotten sooner to where we are now—wedding the powerful tool of fieldwork with the abiding challenge to rigorously contextualize these studies in time, space, political economy, and global flow—if complex societies bearing their own voluminous histories had stayed within the anthropological gaze? History does not allow space for speculation about what might have been, but it is possible to suggest that something was lost from the discipline at large—or at least significantly delayed—when China fell out of early twentieth-century anthropology's gaze so completely that the telling of this story becomes a spectral counterhistory (Derrida 1994).

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NOTES

1. See Latourette (1936:57–68) for a complete bibliography of Laufer's work.
2. For example, Cole (1999:2, 287). Stocking's Boas reader includes a report on the work of the East Asiatic Committee, which Stocking describes as part of Boas's attempt to "expand the horizons of his anthropological activity" (Stocking 1974:283, 294–297), but there is no further reference to this project in any of Stocking's four edited anthologies on anthropology's early history (Stocking 1983, 1989, 1991, 1996). Marshall Hyatt describes Laufer as "a friend" of Boas but does not explain the connection (Hyatt 1990:31). Darnell mentions Laufer and East Asia in relation to Boas's anthropology program at Columbia (Darnell 1998:160). In their summations of Boas's life and work, Goldschmidt (1959), Handler (1990), Hegeman (1998), Pierpont (2004), and Sanjek (1996) make no mention of Boas's anthropological interest in Asia.
3. Boas and the Asiatic Committee also get a deserved mention in the history of the development of Asian studies at Columbia (deBary 2006:594).
4. Bennet Bronson (2006) also mentions the Schiff expedition as prelude to Laufer's work in China on behalf of the Field Museum.
5. Schiff was more than casually interested in the Far East. He had unsuccessfully sought to establish banking interests in China for his firm, Kuhn, Loeb and Company. The firm would decisively fund Japan in the Russo-

- Japanese War (1904–1905), in part owing to Russia’s anti-Semitic policies. For this support, Schiff would travel to Japan in 1906 and be decorated by the emperor with the Order of the Rising Sun (Cohen 1999:33–36).
6. Schiff initially offered to cover the expenses of the first year to encourage other donors. When funds were not forthcoming, Schiff agreed to subsidize the entire expedition. This was the most significant contribution made by any member of the Asiatic Committee. Columbia, meanwhile, received an important behest for Chinese studies, given in the name of “Dean Lung” but assumed to have been provided by General Horace Walpole Carpentier, a trustee (Baick 1998:84–152; deBary 2006:594). Despite effort on Boas’s part, Carpentier could not be persuaded to join the Committee (East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files, DAA, AMNH).
 7. The Committee included Edward D. Adams, a financier and trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia University; Clarence Cary and C. C. Cuyler, bankers; John Foord, secretary of the American Asiatic Association, a business interest group; E. H. Harriman and James J. Hill, railway magnates; Clarence H. Mackay, president of Commercial Pacific Cable Company; Howard Mansfield, a lawyer and president of the art aficionados’ Grolier Club; James R. Morse, president of a trading company who would invest in Korean gold mines; William Barclay Parsons, president of the American China Development Company and a trustee of Columbia University; George A. Plimpton, a trustee of Barnard College; and Jacob H. Schiff, banker. AMNH representation included Morris K. Jesup, president of the Asiatic Committee; Hermon C. Bumpus, director; John H. Winser, treasurer of the Asiatic Committee; and Franz Boas, curator and secretary of the Asiatic Committee.
 8. His fellow Siberia expeditionists, Waldemar Bogoras and Waldemar Jochelson, although equally peripatetic, drew upon years of prior ethnographic observation, painfully acquired as political exiles in Siberia, in preparing their detailed monographs on the Chukchi, Koryak, Yukaghir, and Yakut (Sakha) (Freed, Freed, and Williamson 1988; Krupnik and Vakhtin 2003).
 9. Indeed, he even suggested to Boas that the museum establish “an epigraphical department to show the development of writing in Asia and Europe and picture writing in Australia and the Americas” (Laufer to Boas, 18 May 1902, 1902-4, DAA, AMNH).
 10. Now called Kwakwaka’wakw.

11. When asked if the Asiatic Committee should not prioritize Philippines research over the planned China expedition, “owing to the present political importance of the Philippine problems,” Boas argued forcefully for China on the grounds that “Philippines (that is Malay) culture is an outgrowth of aboriginal Indian, West Asiatic, and East Asiatic cultures; consequently if we confine ourselves to work in Malay countries, we are building without a foundation, which must be laid particularly in India and in China” (Boas to Schiff, 31 January 1901, East Asiatic Committee, 1894–1907 Correspondence Files, DAA, AMNH). Although a dominant scholarly view at the time, this is an unexpected assertion from a man whose life’s work affirmed the worth of “cultures” constructed by hunters, gatherers, and horticulturalists, but in January of 1901, having carefully primed Laufer for fieldwork, and aware of interests in developing Chinese studies at Columbia, he was likely loath to see this unique opportunity slip away.
12. Laufer’s rubbings now reside in the Field Museum, where he ended his career.
13. There is no evidence that these commissions were ever fulfilled or that the street scene or the models ever reached New York.
14. Area studies, and most particularly the growth of East Asian studies in North America, is commonly regarded as a child of the Cold War, with an intensification of government and other institutional support for China studies prompted by the so-called loss of China to revolution in 1949. With the end of the Cold War, strategic and economic interests would remain prominent. The arguments that Boas had made in the name of national interest are very much alive in this corner of the academy.

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