

An Interview with Dr. Tze-Ki Hon, Professor of History

Brendan Mahoney

What's great for you about GREAT Day?

Hon: GREAT Day is great because it turns the whole college into a gigantic conference center and gives students and staff the opportunity to learn, to explore, and to discover new knowledge. In one day, everyone is a learner, regardless of their rank, role, and responsibility.

What impact do you think GREAT Day has on our campus culture?

Hon: The effect of GREAT Day on campus culture is enormous. It reminds everyone (students, faculty, and staff) of what SUNY Geneseo stands for. It is not just a place to work or to get a bachelor's degree. Rather, it is a place of learning where the liberal arts environment nurtures and develops the beautiful mind.

Why does undergraduate research in general matter to you?

Hon: To me, the purpose of undergraduate research is not the research result. Frankly, the four-year college does not provide enough training and knowledge to students to make ground-breaking discoveries. Those new discoveries are made in the PhD programs. Instead, the purpose of undergraduate research is to give students a sense of what it looks like to be a researcher, encouraging them to continue learning after graduating from college. In this sense, GREAT Day is extremely important in showing what comes next after graduation.

What's your interest in the specific topics being researched in the following two papers?

Hon: In “‘New China, Great Olympics’: A Historical Study of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games” I was impressed by Thomas Garrity's acute sensitivity to collective memory. In the paper, he focuses on an enduring memory among the Chinese—China is the “Sick Man of Asia” due to a century of continuous defeats by foreigners. This memory has been passed from generation to generation in schools, novels, cinemas, television programs, and more recently, animated games. What Garrity shows in his paper is the massive expression of this national anxiety in international sports competitions. Sometimes this national anxiety could push athletes to work harder to achieve a better result, but in other times this national anxiety could be a tool of the Chinese government to garner domestic support (e.g., the 2008 Beijing Olympics). Whether it is for personal glory or national pride, Garrity argues that international sports in China are arena for national redemption where “the Century of Humiliation” ends and “the rise of China” begins.

In “*Fist of Fury or Drunken Master: Masculinity, National Identity, and Modern China*,” I was intrigued by Peter Benson's creative use of the martial arts movies to elucidate the drastic changes in the Chinese national identity from Mao's China to post-Mao China. Methodologically, Benson is unique in the sense that he connects three separate fields of study—the study of movies, the study of Chinese nationalism, and the study of masculinity. More significantly, he connects the three fields under the context of China's great transformation from a socialist planned economy to an innovative market economy serving neo-liberal global capitalism.



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