

China, Astoria and the nation that didn't happen

Governors and their Asian “trade missions” are widely believed to be beguiling vacations at public or corporate expense: A photo circulating this week of ex-Gov. John Kitzhaber and fiancée Cylvia Hayes visiting Tianjin, China in 2011 plays on this suspicion.

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee just returned from a nine-day trip to Japan and South Korea, partly spent promoting controversial coal terminals in Longview and Bellingham. *The Seattle Times*’ Jon Talton observed, “So do we beat on, boats against the current of climate change, for a few quick bucks? The ‘greenest governor’ will have to square that.”



Matt Winters

So it has always been with U.S.-Asian relations: Lusting for the exotic, while avidly selling them whatever they want for as much as we can get. Flying west across the dateline somehow discombobulates ethical compasses.

A nearly century-old ad for the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. illustrates the lust part of this slippery moral equation: “Longing for that feeling of utter release, of absolute freedom, which comes with travel in strange lands and fascinatingly ‘different’ civilizations? ... Petty restraints and inhibitions disappear as by magic, even before the mysterious, gay, alluring East is reached.” Though the ad features a demure white woman in a deckchair, the kind of pleasures implied at the far end of the voyage are patently more to do with Anaïs Nin than Edith Wharton.

The China Trade

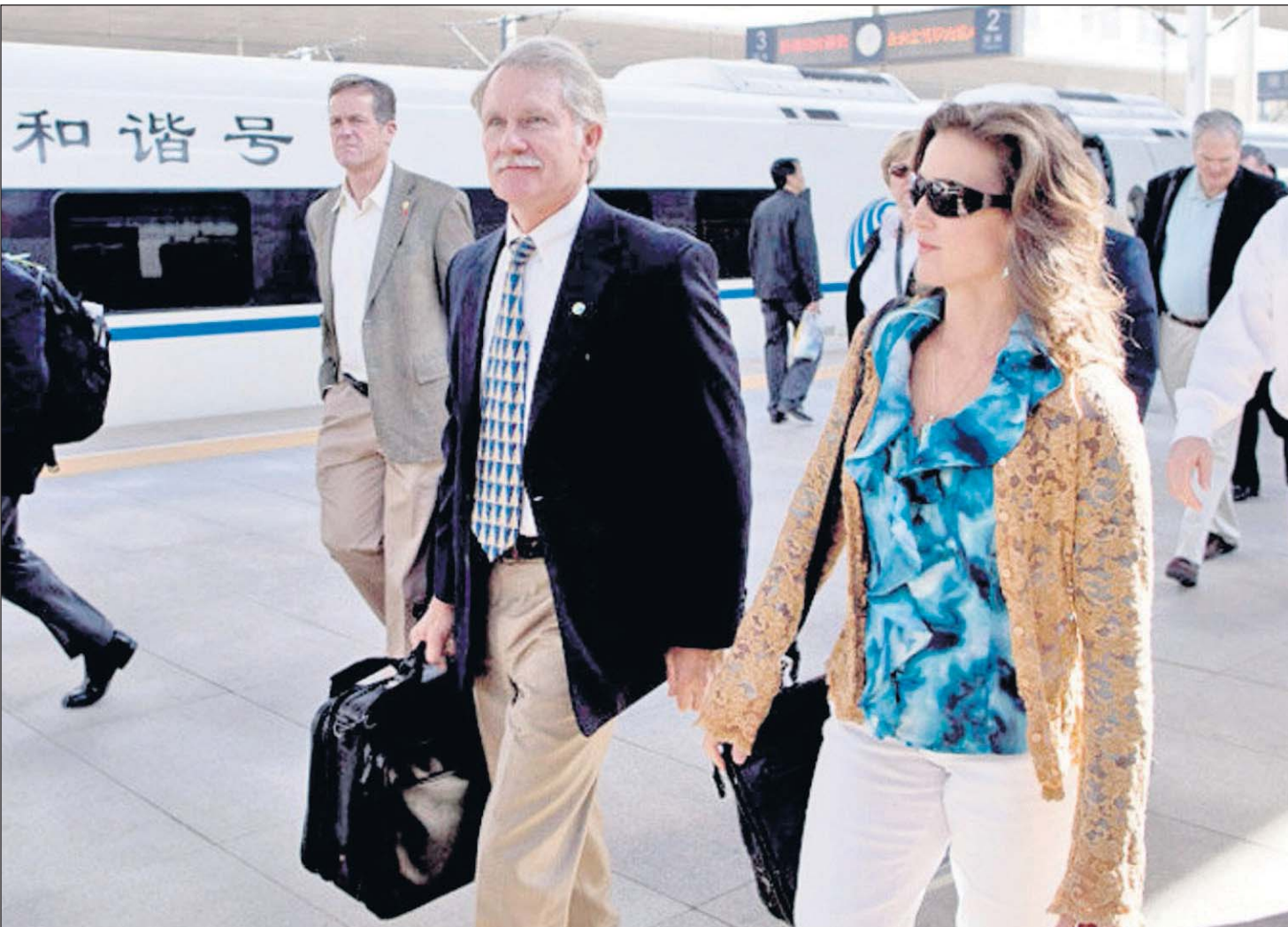
Though I poke fun at our Pacific Northwest politicians and their curious affection for Asian junkets, they tread in famous footsteps — or sail in famous wakes. Our coast’s economic fate has been closely bound up with China and Japan since our nation’s earliest days.

Americans became known in China as the “New People” when Capt. Samuel Shaw opened Canton to U.S. trade in 1784. Initially exporting ice and apples, it took quite a while for us make more than a scratch in the Asian marketplace, including India.

A 1924 article in *Asia* magazine, “When New England sailed to China,” by historians Marjorie and Sydney Greenbie, reports that “Thoreau, watching Irishmen cut ice from Walden Pond for the India market, was pleased with the thought that, while he was drinking deep of Indian philosophy from the pages of the Vedas, the Hindu mystics would be drinking iced drafts from his own pond. Thus, he said, was the sacred water of the Ganges mixed with the liquid of New England hills.”

A key figure in expanding the U.S.-China exports far beyond ice was John Ledyard. Close friend of Thomas Jefferson, business partner with John Paul Jones and — most importantly for Astoria history — a British marine on Capt. James Cook’s 1776-1780 Pacific exploration, Ledyard is said to have been the first American citizen to visit the West Coast. Returning from the Cook expedition, Ledyard ignited a new industry by telling New Englanders that the Chinese were crazy about the furs he and his shipmates initially acquired from Pacific Northwest Indians to use as mattresses.

At Jefferson’s suggestion, in 1786 Ledyard set out from London with the intention of reaching America’s Pacific Coast via Russia and the Bering Strait. He was then meant to document the virgin country between Oregon



Andy Wong/Associated Press

Former Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber and girlfriend Cylvia Hayes visiting China in 2011.

The ORIENT via Honolulu

The ships are:
Pres. Cleveland June 10 Aug. 19
Pres. Pierce June 24 Sept. 2
Pres. Taft July 8 Sept. 16
Pres. Wilson July 22 Sept. 30
Pres. Lincoln Aug. 5 Oct. 14

The Magic Freedom of Travel

Matt Winters/Collection

A steamship ad from the “Roaring 20s” features an innocent-looking tourist, but ad copy farther down the page promotes the libertine delights of the exotic Far East.

and Virginia, nearly two decades before Lewis and Clark. But on orders of Empress Catherine the Great, he was arrested in Siberia and is largely forgotten by history.

Later, during his presidential administration, another of Jefferson’s unsuccessful schemes — a self-imposed embargo on international commerce — bankrupted my distant ancestor Ira Winter and many other Americans whose livelihoods depended on trade. But the embargo spurred John Jacob Astor to undertake what the Greenbies call “the most entertaining hoax and the most magnificent project for political and commercial expansion devised in that age” — the founding of Astoria.

Astor’s hoax — designed to break the embargo — consisted of convincing Jefferson

son that “A Chinese official, with an aged father at home, had come over to America on a ship belonging to Astor. Regardless of expense, courtesy demanded that he (Astor) should see this personage to the very gates of Canton.” The president gave his consent and on Aug. 5, 1808, Astor’s ship the Beaver sailed from New York. “Almost before the Beaver was out of sight, the press caught on to the joke. The mandarin was none other than a vagrant Chinese who had been picked up in the park.” The Beaver not only took this gentleman to Canton, but first visited the prospective site of Astoria. The round-trip resulted in a profit of \$200,000 back in Manhattan, or roughly \$4 million in 2015 dollars.

Editor's Notebook

Astoria wasn't to be just a fur-trading outpost, but the capital of a separate country.

New nation's capital

This, naturally, inflamed Astor’s passion for easy money and big dreams. In fact, according to the Greenbies, Astoria wasn’t to be just a fur-trading outpost, but the capital of a separate country, established with U.S. cooperation.

“It was to be a grand political experiment, the founding on the Pacific Coast of a new nation, who, as Jefferson said, ‘should spread themselves through the whole length of that coast, covering it with free and independent Americans, unconnected with us by ties of blood and interest, and enjoying, like us, the rights of self-government.’ This new state was to be supported by and to monopolize the trade with China,” the Greenbies wrote.

The War of 1812 intervened, momentum was lost, and Astoria is the colorful little city it is today, rather than a West Coast corollary to Washington, D.C., and a mighty political and economic metropolis in partnership with China.

But history twists and turns. Who knows? Maybe Astoria’s real glory years are yet to come.

— M.S.W.

Open forum

Warrenton's legacy

To Warrenton readers, and the Warrenton City Commission, re Oregon LNG: This is a project that is larger than anything any public agency has ever handled in this region. Our small cities are not staffed to deal with the questions or the monitoring that is before us.

Warrenton is now a fishing village surrounded by nature, and comfortable for a range of families and lifestyle choices. Approval of this project will change that forever, and invite further industrial construction.

The mooring basin, where thousands of people come to enjoy fishing, will be inalterably changed, as tankers and their safety escorts, both entering and exiting, block the use of the river approximately two-thirds of the year. Commercial fishing fleets will be severely limited by this major change.

Home values will be reduced, and people will be unable to sell, due to the presence of this terminal with compromised air quality, noise, light and traffic.

Leucadia Corp. is offering little to mitigate the impacts on both state and local streets. Improvements are pretty

much limited to Harbor Avenue, which will be virtually impassable for two to three years. Where are the offers to deal with the dangers of fire, explosions and increased police demands? They dangle the promise of millions of dollars in taxes, hoping that we can be bought off.

The pipeline construction will last up to three years, with an estimated additional 486 additional trucks, and 812 more vans or small trucks. The impact is grossly understated. We already know that traffic has backed up repeatedly all summer, both to the south and to the north.

That most jobs will be for outside workers is acknowledged by the promise to bring workers in from outside the area in vans and buses, and by the active support from Portland labor unions. Where will over 1,000 workers be housed, and what will they do after hours? Will there be training for local workers?

Experts in air-quality analysis have said that this proposed plant would be second only to the Boardman Power plant in terms of air pollution in the state of Oregon. This will affect all of us.

No municipal fire department can be set up to manage the kind of fires seen at San Bruno, Calif. It would take hours to days to assemble the expert emergency personnel and equipment needed. Tom Horning, our expert geologist, calls this the “worst possible site” on the river and on the Oregon Coast. There are reasons that California will not accept any new LNG terminals.

You may dismiss the testimony of us Astoria residents. But think about what you are contemplating for your own community, which will no longer be the place you enjoy. That will be this commission’s legacy, if you continue to proceed with this project.

JAN MITCHELL
Astoria

Davis makes a point

I have been thinking about the clerk Kim Davis, a Democrat by the way, who would not issue marriage licenses to same sex couples. There are a lot of people in the buzz who are saying you must obey the law no matter what, while others accuse her of grandstand-

ing and grabbing her “15 minutes of fame.”

The fact is, she makes a very good point that I believe is being ignored. Laws are made by legislation, passed by representatives of the people. Referendums bypass the legislative procedure when people agree on law by the vote. What doesn’t have the right to write law is a court. The court can only sit in judgment over the laws already passed. City clerks follow statutes that have been codified. This how the system is set up, but not the way it has functioned of late.

If judges have the right to write the laws and sit in judgment over their laws, we are a public being ruled by judges. It doesn’t matter if we are ruled by people with crowns on their heads, or judges sitting in black robes, they are acting as absolute monarchs, kings and queens. This violates everything this nation is about.

In America, the government doesn’t rule its people, the people rule their government.

JIM JENKINS
Astoria

Think twice

I want to have Astorians note the comments of Astoria Port Commissioner Bill Hunsinger before the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission meeting in Seaside on Sept 4. Hunsinger said that sportfishermen and fishing guides are causing a problem in Astoria because they are plugging boat ramps and port facilities, including marina dock space at the boat basins.

Is Hunsinger saying he does not want the economic stimulus that the fishermen provide to Astoria? Maybe he ought to talk to his constituents first about this? Think about all the jobs, housing rentals, restaurants, and service industries that might lose business in August if it were not for the fishermen “clogging up” port facilities.

I would call these “happy problems” that many communities would love to have. Maybe Astorians might like to think about voting for Hunsinger in the next election?

BLAINE ACKLEY
Hillsboro



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