

Asia Society's Asian Educational Resource Center (AERC)

by Namji Kim Steinemann

The growing recognition of Asia's rich and dynamic history, its importance in global affairs, and the significance of the Asian American population have prompted many educators to strive to improve the study of Asia in the K-12 curriculum. But, with thirty-three countries—including the central Asian republics, Australia, and New Zealand—accounting for over 3.3 billion people, this is not an easy task. At the very least, teachers and schools need up-to-date curricular resources, specialized training, accurate information, and materials. This is particularly true at the elementary and secondary levels, where teachers lack time or training in Asian studies and have little or no access to quality Asia-related programs and materials.

Just as the pressing need for these resources is being recognized universally, schools throughout the U. S. are facing fiscal constraints that limit their development. This combination of increased demand and decreasing funds would be disastrous were it not for the growing network of resource providers, including the Association for Asian Studies, the National Council for the Social Studies, university-based outreach centers, museums, and other nonprofit institutions like the Asia Society, that are working individually and collaboratively to improve understanding of Asia at the K-12 level and beyond. Contributing to this vital effort remains the topmost priority of the Asia Society.

Since its founding in 1956, the central mission of the Asia Society has been to improve American understanding of Asia and to foster communication between Asians and Americans. Because its mandate is pan-Asian and multidisciplinary, the Society's work encompasses all regions of Asia as well as all aspects of Asian life and U. S.-Asia relations. This comprehensive focus allows the Society to function as a "network of networks," providing common ground for exchanges across national, cultural, and aca-



Students demonstrate educational software at a public conference sponsored by the Asia Society's Educational Resource Center (AERC). Photo courtesy: Elsa Ruiz.

ademic boundaries. In addition to its ongoing arts and public affairs presentations, the Asia Society is working to design and deliver K-12 programs that make high-impact, cost-effective use of available resources. The primary vehicle for this effort is AERC. For maximum impact, AERC concentrates its activities in three clearly defined areas: information dissemination, curriculum development, and staff development. These translate into the three closely coordinated components: *AskAsia*, the information clearinghouse of AERC, with its own K-12 Web site (<http://www.askasia.org>); *AsiaInteractive*, specializing in the development of multimedia materials that fill curricular gaps; and *TeachAsia*, a staff development program for K-12 teachers.

AskAsia

AskAsia was conceived as a means through which to disseminate timely information about the variety of resources on Asia to the widest possible audience. In collaboration with AERC's institutional partners—which include the Center for Educational Media, the ERIC Clearinghouse, and the National Association of Japan-America Societies—the *AskAsia* Web site helps the K-12 education community share news, access support,

and keep current on what's available. Thanks to the latest technology, the Web site provides easy connections through clickable icons to other information sources and allows for frequent updating. Schools that are not yet connected to the Internet can access *AskAsia*'s rich offerings of classroom-ready resources through toll-free telephone (1-888-ASK-ASIA) and fax (1-888-FAX-ASIA) services.

AskAsia has generated more than 75,000 hits per month. Moreover, this popular site was recently expanded and enhanced, with clearer icons, a cleaner design, more cross-referenced hyperlinks, a communication center for educators, and a new area featuring activities and information especially appealing to young people.

AsiaInteractive

AsiaInteractive develops learner-centered, teacher-friendly materials that are targeted to fill gaps in today's K-12 curriculum.

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APPENDIX: Utilizing the Scenarios: Electronic and Print Media Resources Continued

the new Special Administrative Region (SAR) will be governed, the Joint Declaration of 1984 in which Britain recognizes China's sovereignty over Hong Kong, and the new Hong Kong flag and emblem (the Bauhinia flower). It links to a larger site on Chinese culture and civilization.

Beijing Review

<http://www-cibtc.ceic.gov.cn/bjreview/BJRREVIEW.HTML>

China's premier weekly news magazine covers China's economic and social developments and carries important documents of the Chinese government and speeches made by state leaders. Since the scope of the *Review* is China in its entirety, its coverage of Hong Kong is periodic, but very important, as it represents the Chinese government's official point of view on Hong Kong related topics.

China Books and Periodicals

<http://www.chinabooks.com/>

This is the main importer and distributor of books and magazines from China. Basically, it is a catalogue outlet for materials, primarily from China, but from other sources as well. It can process subscriptions for most of China's major periodicals, including *Beijing Review* (U. S. \$41 per year). You can also get their catalogue via "snail" mail: China Books & Periodicals, 2929 24th Street, San Francisco, CA 94110. Phone (415) 282-2994. Fax: (415) 282-0994.

History of Hong Kong

<http://www.stolaf.edu/people/glasoe/project.html>

Research project (in progress) by a student at St. Olaf College. Ultimately, it will cover topics from Early History and the Opium War to The Future of Hong Kong.

Selected Print Resources on Hong Kong

The list below is a very short compilation of general sources with commentary. This list, of course, is far from complete, and there are many excellent books and articles that do not appear here. I have intentionally kept the list short and purposeful, with the twin criteria of emphasis on contemporary events and relative ease of accessibility to teachers in North America.

BOOKS

Hong Kong 1996. Hong Kong: Government Printing Office, 1996.

The Hong Kong Government's Information Services Department puts out this annual yearbook of data plus a topical review of most aspects of life in Hong Kong (legal, economic, environmental, population, etc.) including a review of the events of the past year. Thus, *Hong Kong 1996* reviews the year 1995. Its Appendices are a rich source of data about Hong Kong. It is available from the Hong Kong Government Publications Centre, Queensway Government Offices, Low Block, Ground Floor, 66 Queensway, Hong Kong.

Cheung, Stephen Y. L. and Stephen M. H. Sze, eds.

The Other Hong Kong Report. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1995.

This critical annual review (since 1989) of events in Hong Kong is meant to "counteract official misrepresentation," especially as found in the Government yearbook cited above. It is prepared by scholars, professionals, and commentators to provide a more critical viewpoint of Hong Kong than that in the Government's yearbook, and thus provides a good balance to official perspectives.

Miners, Norman. *The Government and Politics of Hong Kong*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Now in its fifth edition, this definitive description of the politics of Hong Kong was recently updated to add considerable material reflecting the issues and background of the 1997 transition. Its Appendix includes the most important constitutional documents, including the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law.

Chan, Ming K. and Gerard Postiglione, eds.

The Hong Kong Reader: Passage to Chinese Sovereignty. New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1996

This collection of recent writings by academics, most of them based in Hong Kong, looks at some of the basic issues governing Hong Kong's future: politics, judicial practice, education, migration, economics, etc. I found the last article by Alvin So and Reginald Kwok ("Socioeconomic Center, Political Periphery: Hong Kong's Uncertain Transition Toward the Twenty-first Century," 209-216) particularly useful as a teaching tool because it outlines three scenarios for Hong Kong's future.

Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, David Newman and Alvin Rabushka. *Red Flag Over Hong Kong*. Chatham, New Jersey: Chatham House Publishers, 1996.

This book calls itself a "handbook" about the future of Hong Kong. It bases its forecasts on future developments in China and Hong Kong on an explicit analytic model of decisionmaking. As might be surmised from the title, it paints a "bleak picture indeed" of Hong Kong's future, and I include it because it is very recent and provides one of the most articulate descriptions of a "negative scenario" of Hong Kong's future. It includes the text of the Joint Declaration in the Appendix.

PERIODICALS

In the months before and immediately after July 1997, there will be a virtual glut of articles about Hong Kong in the mainstream U. S. media. However, for continuing and informed coverage of the Hong Kong transition, the best of the relatively accessible sources would be articles in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* and *The Economist*. For a Chinese governmental perspective, there are periodic articles on Hong Kong in *Beijing Review*.

NOTES

1. Chee-hwa Tung, "Living Up to the Challenge Ahead," *South China Morning Post*, 18 December, 1996. "One Country/Two Systems" is the formula by which China will resume its exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong in July 1997, but not impose its socialist system on Hong Kong for a period of fifty years. Reportedly the policy was first developed by China's leadership for the purpose of reunification of Taiwan with the mainland, but it was applied to Hong Kong in the negotiations with Britain about the future of Hong Kong in the early 1980s.
2. In Asia and the Pacific Region, Hong Kong has the third highest gross national product per capita. At U. S. \$21,650 per capita, its GNP is marginally behind Singapore's (U. S. \$23,360 per capita) and still well behind Japan (U. S. \$34,630

per capita). However, Hong Kong's GNP per capita is forty-one times that of China (U. S. \$530 per capita). Hong Kong also has more than U. S. \$70 billion fiscal reserves.

3. For a fuller description of this issues-centered, future-oriented teaching approach, see, e.g., Wilma S. Longstreet, "Alternative Futures and the Social Studies," in *Handbook on Teaching Social Issues*, ed. Ronald W. Evans and David W. Saxe, (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1996), 317-326. Longstreet advocates the development of multiple models of the future so that students can compare and evaluate their likely outcomes. Students can then "be encouraged to take positions and defend them utilizing scenarios and research tools." (323) Longstreet argues that this future-

oriented, issues-centered mode of instruction creates a kind of complex learning hub that creates opportunities for students to create competencies in (a) communications and information handling, (b) facing uncertainties, (c) value formation, (d) inquiry, and (e) decision making.

4. Alvin Y. So and Reginald Y. Kwok, "Socioeconomic Center, Political Periphery: Hong Kong's Uncertain Transition Toward the Twenty-First Century," in *The Hong Kong Reader*, eds. Ming K. Chan and Gerard A. Postiglione. Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1996, 209-216.
5. "Outlook Bleak, Says '97 Survey," *Sunday Morning Post*, Sunday, 26 May, 1996, Money section. Edited for classroom use with additional notes supplied by this article's author.