houses. Gabriel Presler, Carleton '94, cautioned students about the research hurdles she encountered in Pune when writing a paper on the Jesuits in Maharashtra, and Peter Shapinsky, Kenyon '96, chose to paint a word picture of a solo visit he made to a castle outside of Tokyo.

The variety of pieces published in the Exchange includes book reviews (e.g., Gilbert Johnston, Eckerd College, on Barbara Finkelstein's Transcending Stereotypes: Discovering Japanese Culture and Education), announcements of initiatives such as Bridge To Asia which conducts book drives on American campuses for colleges, universities, research centers, and government agencies in Asia, articles by faculty (e.g., Rita Pulliam, Elon College, "Study Abroad: Understanding Individualism and Collectivism in a Global Village"), and in each issue, a syllabus (e.g., Alfredo Gonzales, Hope College, Encounters with Cultures). "Asia Online" is a regular column on electronic communications written by Alice Chin Myers, Simon's Rock College of Bard.

Conclusion

A variety of general and particular elements have found expression in the organization of the ASIANetwork. In a brief three years, the ASIANetwork not only developed around this combination of opportunities and needs, but also has responded to them with a variety of practical initiatives. The Network has a firm foundation, and all lines are open. ■

Note: 1996 ASIANetwork Conference

The 1996 ASIANetwork Conference will be held April 26-28 at the Hickory Ridge Conference Center, Lisle, Illinois (suburban Chicago). Among its discussions and plenary sessions, the program will feature Asian language instruction, a continuation of the three-year discussion of human rights in Asia, and practical suggestions for candidates interested in teaching positions at liberal arts colleges.

For information about joining the ASIANetwork and about the ASIANetwork Conference, contact:
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Constructing Teen Tokyo: Museums and Teaching About Asia

By Elaine Vukov

Teen Tokyo: Youth and Popular Culture, an exhibition at the Children's Museum in Boston, Massachusetts, represents the coming of age in contemporary Tokyo from the perspective of the teenager. Although designed for young Americans, it is instructive for all age groups. For those familiar with Japan, the exhibit evokes customs and manners that may be experienced only in Japanese culture. For people who have never visited Japan, the exhibit offers a context to view everyday objects and understand some basic aspects of contemporary life in Japan. Included in the exhibit are a Tokyo subway car, a life-size recreation of a teenager's bedroom, and a stage where museum visitors can try their singing ability using a karaoke machine.

Vukov Since a thirty-three member team of Americans and Japanese worked on "Teen Tokyo," is it safe to assume that we should not put on an exhibit about the Japanese without help from the Japanese themselves?

Bedford Asianists have to be conscious of who is saying what to whom. One of the important things about Teen Tokyo was that it was a cross-cultural collaboration from beginning to end. We were, Japanese and Americans, saying something together and also thinking about our audience together.

Vukov Does this mean there is no role for the well-informed outsider in examining and representing another culture?

Bedford I think the distinction between "outsider" and "insider" voice always has to be clearly acknowledged. Despite more than twenty years of teaching about Japan, I have never been comfortable being called an "expert on Japan." If I am an expert on anything it is on making connections between Japanese and American culture. I think it would be very uncomfortable for us to see an exhibit about teenage New York that was assembled by Japanese alone, even if the Japanese curators lived in the States for a long time and, in some sense, knew us better than we knew ourselves, and they were free of the kinds of myths we want to generate about ourselves. There always has to be dialogue. At times our Japanese collaborators would object to something we wanted to include because they thought it unimportant or embarrassing. We had to talk it out and make decisions, but I think for the most part it worked well for several reasons. One main reason was the people working on the project. The Americans were mostly bilingual and trusted by their Japanese counterparts. The Japanese were interna-
Vukov
Another important issue is that of context. How much cultural background and support material is needed in exhibitions about Asia?

Bedford
Context is about providing the means for people—the visitors—to make connections between what they see and themselves. It may be very simple, for example, a wonderful piece of text like a poem, the way one object is displayed with another, the quality of a video—these can all provide the context. It does not have to mean total immersion. You do not have to recreate an entire Japanese village to experience a basket on some level. This speaks to the issue of expense. It costs a great deal to do an exhibition like Teen Tokyo and ship half of a subway car to Boston. If you want total immersion—feeling as if you were there—there are a lot of ways to achieve it. Situations can be set up in which people’s imaginations take over.

There is another important point to think about in doing cultural exhibitions. Tradition ally, exhibitions begin with the stuff, the collections and how the curator wants to see them. I am interested in exhibits that start with ideas which are then illustrated and played out with objects and other things. The Children’s Museum has a strong Japanese collection but Teen Tokyo began with a series of ideas about how people grow up in Japan today. Then we went looking for great stuff. While we always envy museums with fabulous collections, I think sometimes it is better to do a night ride, an insider’s view of life under the streets of Tokyo in the subway shopping malls at night. It was a hip idea but nobody was going to get it if they had not lived in Tokyo. The museum has an authentic 150-year-old house from Kyoto in one of the galleries. When the designer heard a child refer to it as a “Chinese house,” he understood the gap between our visitors and his sensibilities. We wanted to address a shared experience in a shared world. Kids all over the world are growing up in large urban areas with certain common experiences. We were looking for commonality rather than differences.

Vukov
How much do you have to reproduce and how much do you have to evoke?

Bedford
You do not need a subway car, but it is tremendous fun. At the Historical Society we are developing a small family-oriented exhibit about Jackie Robinson and baseball. The designers want to lower the ceiling of the narrow-entrance and create a feeling of a dugout so the visitors then have the magic sense of walking on the field. If we can do it, it certainly will not cost the $50,000 the subway car cost. But it could do what the subway car does, provide a sense of entering into a special place, a world, where you are invited to learn something new. You always have to think about the audience.

Vukov
Not many Americans know much about Asia. Will taking the audience into consideration too much trivialize or diminish the level of exhibitions?

Bedford
Despite a great deal of research over the past several years, there are still many people in my profession who think that the only alternative to lengthy, didactic labels is a television screen and lots of fancy technology. Actually, it is much harder to do all the scholarly research— as we did for Teen Tokyo — and then write text that will attract visitors’ interest and truly teach. In Teen Tokyo it did not come across as a barrier to innovation. Look at the National Holocaust Museum — they are telling a powerful story which they have illustrated with extraordinary artifacts.

Vukov
Isn’t it that what universities and schools are supposed to be doing? What you are suggesting is a parallel school system and whole new place for people to learn.

Bedford
Museums are primarily educational institutions. They are about a different type of learning than you could get in school. They are about informal learning, about learning on one’s own, about making choices, about intergenerational learning in a multi-sensory setting. Imaginative use of objects can be a very powerful method of teaching.

Vukov
How do you make a show about a subject about which you know very little?

Bedford
This is an exercise in the audience and there needs to be a new input for them, but you have to think about what people know and what stereotypes they hold about the subject matter.

We did formative evaluations on every aspect of Teen Tokyo. We tried out all of our ideas on teenagers before incorporating them into the exhibit design. I know there was an image issue in the case of Japan. One of the major questions was whether our target audience understood that Japan is a modern country with which we have a great many things in common. I asked ten-teen-age visitors to the museum to sort a pile of objects into three separate categories — "Japan, "USA," "Could Be Either." The pile of objects included a kimono (a cloth for wrapping lunch boxes) with a Batman image on it, a Rika-chou doll (similar to Barbie), and a pencil case with a jack-o’ lantern on it. The teens did not know that all of the objects were made and sold in Japan. Objects such as Batman, Halloween pumpkins, and Barbie look-alikes were put in the "USA" pile and did not occur to them to put the objects in the probably not aware of, and what questions they have in their heads. If you are presenting an exhibit that answers questions nobody is asking, it may be a waste of time. This does not mean you stay at the awareness or knowledge level of the audience, but you have to start there. It means acting like a good teacher. You cannot simply hand second-graders about quantum physics but that does not mean you cannot teach them some physics. There will always be experts in the audience and there needs to be new input for them, but you have to think about what people know and what stereotypes they hold about the subject matter.
Resources

“Could Be Either” pile. So we knew that we had to stack the deck because the notion of cross-culture borrowing was not in the mental vocabularies of young Americans. It did not mean that they could not understand this concept, but it just meant we had to make it very clear when we designed the exhibition. Everything was tested. If we saw that people did not get it, we would try another way.

Vukov

Teen Tokyo may be available to travel to other cities. Will it turn into a blockbuster traveling exhibition?

Bedford

Shows about mummies and dinosaurs will always have wider general appeal. Japanese teenage life is something else. But the Asianist in me hopes Americans want to learn about how other cultures go about the business of living.

Additional information about Teen Tokyo

Teenage Tokyo, written by Jo Duffy and illustrated by Takashi Oguro, is a fifty-six-page story of four students attending the fictitious Tokyo Toyo Municipal Junior High School. The main characters struggle with keeping up rigorous academic schedules, being involved in sports competitions, as well as having fun and meeting the challenges of being a teenager in contemporary Tokyo. Written in the highly popular format of authentic Japanese manga (comics), the book is an appealing way for American teens to learn about modern Japan and is accompanied by a teacher’s guide.

The exhibition may travel to other cities. For further information, please contact Ms. Lisa Sankowski at the Children’s Museum (617) 426-6500 x 277.

Suggested Readings


In a Teacher’s Cyber-Lounge: The Emergence of H-ASIA

By Steven A. Leibo & Frank F. Conlon

Introduction

Imagine yourself sitting at your research desk or in front of a class of students confronted with an issue with which you are unfamiliar—one that local library resources simply do not allow you to explore. Recognizing the dilemma, you walk toward your “cyberspace” Asian Studies teacher’s lounge knowing that at any hour of the day or night you will be able to submit a question or concern to professional colleagues all over the world. People ranging from graduate students to the leading scholars in your field will see your question and comment, sometimes within minutes of the query. Well, that is precisely what has been going on for the last twenty months within H-ASIA, an electronic international Asian Studies forum.

Background on the H-ASIA Listserv

H-ASIA, the H-NET list for Asian History (in fact, operating in a broader context of Asian Studies) was launched at the end of March, 1994 by two volunteer co-editors, Frank F. Conlon, of the University of Washington, and Steven A. Leibo of the Sage Colleges and the State University of New York at Albany. Since its inception, the H-ASIA listserv has been open exclusively to professionals and graduate students working in the field of Asian studies at the college or university level. H-ASIA itself is a subunit of H-NET based at Michigan State University and is partially funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. H-NET also runs some 60 other lists, all pertaining to aspects of the Humanities.

H-ASIA today has twelve hundred subscribers in 33 countries around the world. Reflecting the patterns of growth in personal computer use and Internet access, the majority of these subscribers are located in North America. Nevertheless, the participation from around the world is truly impressive. At this writing, we include members from Japan to South Africa, Indonesia to Finland, Taiwan to Spain, India to Argentina, and we particularly look forward to the time when Internet access will enable much wider distribution of H-ASIA in all Asian countries.

The goals of H-ASIA are quite ambitious. We see the list as a means to helping establish the profession of Asian Studies as a truly international scholarly community. State, national, and chronological era specific lists exist now, and we anticipate the creation of more lists in the future. H-ASIA, however, will continue to serve as the principal clearing house of ideas, Asian Studies jobs, conference announcements, and issues of interest to the entire Asian Studies Community. Moreover, recognizing the fact that a very high percentage of our members are responsible for teaching about all of Asia, H-ASIA provides an ideal venue for discussions of both broad, comparative issues and more specialized questions which have comparative implications.

List Activities

On any given day the list of H-ASIA subjects can be quite eclectic. Recent “threads” (on-going conversations) have included discussion of the recent Enola Gay controversy, which led to conversations on the decision to use the A-Bomb in 1945 and India’s attitudes toward nuclear weapons, while another clarified the terms Varna and Jati within the Hindu caste system. The discussion of these topics and others such as urban images in Asian films, China’s relations with Tibet, women warriors in early China, Hong Kong during World War II — all have been made possible by scholars from around the world taking time to share insights and ideas. What many people find most valuable is that the volunteer editors seek to link together posts covering the same subject. Thus, a thread on classroom films might include comments by professors from North America, Europe, Japan, Taiwan, and Australia. They would as well usually include comments from newly