

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 Pullium, 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 On-Line" 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

**T**een 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.

*Teen Tokyo* is an excellent case study of museum practices and educational approaches to representing Asia in museums. Curators and educators are faced with the recurring questions of museum exhibition: from whose perspective is an exhibit created, how much context for the artifacts needs to be provided to make sense to museum visitors, and finally, who is the audience and how much should their knowledge about a topic be taken into consideration in developing exhibitions? *Teen Tokyo* offers answers to these questions with notable success.

To help investigate some of the pedagogical issues behind this highly regarded exhibit, Elaine Vukov, Director of Educational Outreach at the Japan Society in New York, recently interviewed the curator of the exhibit, Leslie Bedford. Formerly at the Children's Museum, Leslie is now at the Brooklyn Historical Society.

### 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-

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A "typical" rider on the Tokyo subway: a priest meditating.



Elaine Vukov

tional in their thinking and outlook. As soon as we started testing ideas on Americans before designing the final exhibition, the Japanese team members saw that what they wanted to say about themselves sometimes did not communicate with American families. They understood that reaching the audience is a critical issue. It is not standard museum practice to start with the audience.

## Vukov

*How did you incorporate a Japanese perspective into the development of the exhibition? Did you receive support from the local Japanese community?*

## Bedford

We had a history of working with the local community on projects and employed several Japanese staff members. Outside of the binational team at the museum, there were long-term Japanese residents of the U.S. who did not, at least initially, support this project. They criticized it as "only being about blue jeans" and insulting to Japan and the more traditional culture they thought we should be presenting. This perspective is more understandable when you realize these people have spent their adult lives feeling they had to "explain" Japanese culture to Americans.

We also looked to government officials for help. We received support almost immediately from the Consulate General and the Japan Foundation. This surprised me because I had been told that the older generation would not want to have the younger generation in Japan portrayed in museums. I later learned that at the time we initially approached them, Japanese officialdom

had just concluded its own in-house discussion and decided the era of only portraying traditional Japan — *kimono*, *Nō* and the like — should end. They wanted a new emphasis on the similarities rather than the differences between our cultures. So the timing for an exhibit on international youth culture was perfect. Most of the people we spoke to and involved in the planning were younger and international in their thinking. We wanted to look at Japan in a broader context than had often been done — we did not want to romanticize it or demonize it. It was not about "them" and "us" so much as it was about "we." The support we received was wonderful and, of course, our timing was good since this was before the financial boom ended.

We also had to help our Japanese collaborators understand the American audience we were trying to reach. Our Japanese design consultant was a wonderful, talented designer. His image of the exhibit was to do a nightscape, 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 Kyōto 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

*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, a photo, music, 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 exhibits. Traditionally, exhibits begin with the stuff, the collections and how the curator wants us 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, at the same time, they can become 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 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 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 magical sense of walking onto 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 where you realize you are going 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 them something worthwhile. Good exhibits also incorporate other



Life-sized picture of a high school girl's uniform with a hole for the face so museum visitors can put themselves in the girl's place.

formats — a resource area, for instance — for providing additional in-depth information for those that want it. Most people do not come to exhibits to learn everything written about the subject; for that they can read a book. But this sort of visitor-centered thinking is still considered pandering to the least common denominator, a kind of “dumbing down.” When criticized for failing to consider family audiences, these professionals substitute expensive but equally ineffective technology for the two-dimensional texts. I get rather discouraged when I see this since we really now know how to create exhibits that both educate and entertain — as is being proved all the time by museums all over the country. It is an exciting time for the field.

Museums need to pay attention to how people learn. To understand this, museums need to invest in front-end evaluation. Not only do museums need to think about the subject being exhibited, but also examine what people already know, what people are

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 talk to 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.

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 knew 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 industrialized country with which we have a great many things in common. I asked 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 *furoshiki* (a cloth for wrapping lunch boxes) with a Batman image on it, a *Rika-chan* 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 into the “USA” pile. It did not occur to them to put the objects in the



"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**

Bennett, Tony. *The Birth of the Museum*. London: Routledge, 1995.  
Duffy, Jo. *Teenage Tokyo*. Boston: The Children's Museum and the Japan Forum, 1992.  
Hooper-Greenhill, Eileen. *The Educational Role of the Museum*. London: Routledge, 1994.  
Karp, Ivan, and Steven D. Lavine, eds. *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1991.

## **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 Listserve**

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 listserve 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