

NETWORK NEWS

From the Executive Director



ASIANetwork 2005-2006 Report: Last Year's Highlights, This Year's Challenges

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Network Advances

This past year set records for ASIANetwork in two aspects: we ended the year with an all-time high in membership—176 institutional members, 138 full members, 27 associate members, and 11 affiliate organizations (see list on inside back cover); and for the first time, attendance at the spring conference reached 200.

These records are again a testimony to the increasing vitality of the consortium and the affirmation of ASIANetwork's role in promoting Asian Studies at liberal arts institutions. And as we continue to attract new members, we continue to deliver the different programs that have defined the kind of benefits that are available to faculty members at ASIANetwork member institutions. At the beginning of this calendar year the various selection committees chose the recipients for the different grants: the eight schools that will receive arts consultancy visits, the four schools that will host visiting Vietnamese scholars and the 13 research

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teams comprising 65 students and faculty mentors who went on their research to Asia this past summer. Altogether, nearly 100 people are directly involved in various ASIANetwork projects this coming year.

Responding to Setbacks

We also had our share of setbacks last year: we did not receive funding from the Department of Education for a second Pearl River Delta faculty development seminar, and we were not able to secure funding for the second volume of our book series that focuses on missionary archives. At the April meeting, the Board accepted these setbacks as a challenge and responded accordingly. Instead of pursuing funding for another Pearl River Delta faculty development seminar, the Board decided to be more pro-active and consider other potential areas in Asia for such kind of seminar. Thus a new committee, the Future Faculty Development Projects Committee was formed, chaired by board vice-chair Don Clark with Bob Eng, Jim Kodera, Mary-Ann Milford and Cathy Benton as members. This group will develop ideas for group faculty development seminars at various sites in Asia. Once a program is approved by the Board, a subcommittee will write a proposal that will be passed to the Development Committee to search for funding.

Our inability to secure funding for the second volume of the book series and our difficulties identifying a potential benefactor to fund the entire book series (with six volumes in addition to the *Asian Art in the Undergraduate Curriculum* that is funded by the Luce Foundation) have inspired us to consider alternative ways for producing the book series. Discussions are now on-going about the possibility for web-based publication of some, if not all of these

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volumes for our Resources for Undergraduate Teaching series. Still, the challenge will be to identify a potential benefactor for this ambitious project. Hence, the Development Committee has quite a formidable task ahead.

On a more cheery note, ASIANetwork is on solid financial footing. As of the end of June our Vanguard funds totaled \$866,000. This plus the \$390,000 of the Asian Arts grant and other monies that were placed in certificate of deposit last April, the \$433,000 of the grant money from the Freeman Foundation to run the 2007 Student-Faculty Fellows program, and the \$74,000 in checking and savings—all these add up to assets of nearly \$1.763M. With this financial picture, our challenge is to develop programs that meet our needs and to find funding agencies that will support those projects so that we will continue our financial viability after the current grants run out. I am confident that our Board of Directors and Development Committee will do their utmost best to ensure that this happens.

It is simply a pleasure to work with such a dedicated, creative, and stimulating Board of Directors. I am particularly grateful to Richard Bohr, who helped and encouraged me as I wound my way through my first year on this job and who continues to be a key player in his current capacity as *ex-officio* Past Board Chair; to Phyllis Larson, whose brilliance and foresight is evidenced by her leadership in the strategic planning process that we

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have embarked upon (see her piece for more details on this undertaking); and to all the members of the Board, the Development Committee, the Past Chairs Council, and the Council of Advisors for their continued encouragement and faith in me. They each bring their unique strengths and perspectives to the table, and ASIANetwork is so much richer from the dynamism and contributions of these energetic folks. I look forward to another year of whirlwind and exciting activities.

*Thank you to the Illinois Wesleyan
ASIANetwork Team*

ASIANetwork's first year of being headquartered at Illinois Wesleyan University was marked by a flurry of activities: managing membership records,

organizing the Fall Board meeting, selecting grantees for different initiatives, organizing the Council of Advisors meeting and the first Past Chairs Advisory Council meeting at the AAS conference, running the Spring conference, organizing the Spring Board meeting, working on different grant and project initiatives, managing our finances and investments, and producing the three issues of this newsletter.

Taking on these many responsibilities, the Illinois Wesleyan ASIANetwork team delivered on their tasks exceptionally well. Thus I end this piece with an expression of gratitude to all of them: to Linda Tuttle, our controller, who expertly handled the flow of our finances, even through the several weeks

that she was on maternity leave; to Patra Noonan, administrative assistant, who always stepped up to the plate and very capably provided assistance whenever and wherever needed, and whose expertise in PageMaker is evident in the three issues of this newsletter; to Roxy Ransom, student assistant, who cheerily worked as our office gopher and patiently helped in preparing for the conference; and to Tom Lutze and Irv Epstein, co-editors of the *ASIANetwork Exchange*, whose abilities to find just the right materials for publication and whose editorial acumen have raised the quality of the newsletter to new heights. I applaud them all for catching the ASIANetwork spirit, and I sincerely thank them for their dedicated work during this past year. Thanks very much, gang!

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...Reflections on my Asia Travels

I wrote this piece after having returned from a productive and invigorating 40-day trip to Asia, visiting the Philippines; Kunming, Lijiang and Guangzhou in south China; and the Hong Kong and Macao Special Administrative Regions. During this trip the cultural and economic diversity and the vibrancy of this region of the world again became very evident to me.

Of course, I am familiar with the ethnic diversity in my own country, the Philippines, and the plight of its Muslim citizens, who have been displaced from their homes because of the volatile situation in Mindanao and who are now dispersed in different provinces in the country, trying to eke out a living as small merchants. But until this trip, I was far less knowledgeable about Chinese minorities. Thus, I was very pleased when the faculty development seminar sponsored by the School for International Training (SIT) that I attended took us to Kunming and Lijiang where 27 minority groups in China are represented.

A Region of Contrasts

In Lijiang, we saw the meeting of the old and the new—not just old neighborhoods being taken over by modern structures, but the old town of Lijiang preserved as a UNESCO Cultural Heritage City and the other half of the city replete with modern high rises and dotted by western fast foods.

And then there is economic diversity—world stratification replicated in each of the areas I visited. While middle and upper class folks stroll and shop at plush shopping malls and the newly constructed mega-structure that is the Mall of Asia in the Philippines, thousands of children ply the street selling bottled water and snacks to make a living, and millions of people get by on less than four dollars a day.

The economic boom in China similarly has left a number of people behind, especially those in the rural areas. A country that once prioritized providing for all of its citizens now has to deal with the growing economic inequality and the inability of some of its citizens to take advantage of the capitalistic market. There were disabled and homeless people panhandling, street musicians hoping for small donations, and plenty more who cannot afford health insurance coverage.

The industrial growth in Guangzhou is simply staggering; I saw luxury hotels, condominiums and big industrial buildings everywhere, and I also saw small

m e r c h a n t s
stringing beads at their little stalls in a market place called Yi De Lu.

Hong Kong of course is a vibrant financial hub, and now Macao is positioning itself to be the “Las Vegas of Asia.” The Sands casino, one of the

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biggest in Las Vegas, has been operating in Macao for quite some time and beckons to everyone who alights the ferry from Hong Kong. Modern hotels are sprouting along the way from the ferry dock to downtown. But behind this prosperity lie stories of human suffering, like those of domestic workers from the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka who left their families behind to work in oftentimes oppressive conditions in order to send home money to support their families.

The charm, the allure, and the contradictions of Asia are simply fascinating, and we want our students to be as excited about Asia as we are. But while

we are able to pique their curiosity about Asia, our big challenge is to enable them

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acting separately and in addition to the caption.

These interpretive layers have many effects. As a single image is reproduced and displayed across different contexts, the corresponding lineages of representation introduce difference to sameness.

Consider two versions of a photo of PLA soldier Wang Guoxiang, also taken by Li Zhensheng (figs. 2-3).⁹ The first is reprinted from the entire frame of the negative, with a caption supplying context in a fairly straightforward manner. The second has been cropped and given a caption interpreting this particular image with reference to general historical phenomena.

Note the differences in effect. In the first example, Wang is centered in the frame; he appears smaller because the room behind him provides scale; we see that he sits on a bed. The hand with pad in the lower left corner indicates context: this is an interview with a journalist, not a struggle session. In this visual context, his facial expression has an aspect of severity, but one that grows more from earnest explanation than anger or aggression.

Cropping has removed all traces of Wang's surroundings from the second image, leaving him to loom threateningly, even angrily. The journalist and background details have vanished. The editors provide an interpretive framework by labeling him an anonymous "True Believer." Bold face type heightens the

imposition of archetype, while the withholding of Wang's name completes the erasure of identity. The caption ominously describes Red Guards who have "fanned out" across the country to "hunt down 'reactionaries,'" supplying a vocabulary for interpretation: "revolutionary passion and vigor" defines him; he "clasps" the Little Red Book, "points proudly" to his Mao badges, which he has received from peasant audiences "around China" who are "moved by his revolutionary zeal." (Nowhere mentioned is the three-week conference where the photograph was taken.)

The point here is not that *The Chinese Century* has distorted history, but rather that its presentation of this particular image serves a clear rhetorical purpose. Many student films will, of course, engage in far more questionable discursive strategies, some overtly political or unintentionally Orientalist, others simply generated by lack of familiarity with course materials. As with written assignments, this is unavoidable, and indeed an integral part of the educational process. Practice may not make students perfect information producers and consumers, but it helps them to become more critical ones. ●

Endnotes

¹ These remarks have benefited from the feedback of colleagues at the 2006 AsiaNetwork conference in Lisle, IL, and the June, 2006 ACM conference "Introducing a New Generation of

Students to Academic Inquiry," as well as Colorado College's Academic Technology Services staff.

² Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), 65.

³ Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Matthew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1989), xiv.

⁴ Association of College and Research Libraries, *Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2000), 11-14.

⁵ New York: CEL Educational Resources, 1986.

⁶ This project should fall under the purview of "fair use," as long as images are credited and student films not sold. For the current state of copyright law as regards educational and other use, see the website of the Library of Congress's Section 108 Study Group (<http://www.loc.gov/section108/>), especially the comments of Howard Besser.

⁷ <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/index.cfm>; http://via.harvard.edu:9080/via/deliver/home?_collection=via; and <http://www.apimages.com/eng/index.html?photoarchive>

⁸ Li Zhensheng, *Red-Color News Soldier: A Chinese Photographer's Odyssey through the Cultural Revolution* (London: Phaidon, 2003), 179.

⁹ Li, 215; Jonathan Spence and Ann-ping Chin, *The Chinese Century: A Photographic History of the Last Hundred Years* (New York: Random House, 1996), 201.

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to look at Asia not simply through their Western lenses. In a discussion I had with a student from Yale who was participating in an SIT summer program in Kunming for example, he passionately argued that the best solution to the widening income gaps in China was for the poor rural folks to all go to the cities and work there. So much for agricultural development!

My experiences during this trip and my conversations with American students while in Asia further reinforced my conviction of the critical role that ASIANetwork plays in Asian studies in this country. We have our work cut out for us and I am confident that we will meet this challenge! ●

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a mainland tour of Chinese sites. Rashna Singh illustrates Edward Said's concept of *Orientalism* to her students through her analysis of imagery that depicts India according to western preconceptions and stereotypes.

Karil Kucera, as part of a panel that focused upon the benefits and challenges of inter-institutional collaboration, discusses the Image Database to Enhance Asian Studies (IDEAS) project, whereby representatives from four ASIANetwork schools, have created a shared digital database, now available on the worldwide web.

These articles represent only a portion of the conference highlights. Space limitations prevent us from including in this issue several of the excellent presentations from the 2006 conference, but we certainly will do our best to share them with our members in the Winter issue.

These conference presentations, along with the other articles we are publishing in the *Exchange*, are representative of the creativity and innovation that characterize the efforts of many of our ASIANetwork colleagues to teach about Asia with sensitivity and insight. Because outstanding teaching involves discussion as well as collaboration and sharing, we invite your comments and reactions to the articles presented here.

Tom Lutze and Irv Epstein
Co-editors