

# ASIANetwork EXCHANGE

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*From the Editors*

## ASIANetwork Conference, 2006: Teaching with Technologies—Old and New

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This issue of the ASIANetwork Exchange reflects the success of the 14th annual ASIANetwork Conference, held this past April in Lisle, Illinois. With a registration of some two hundred participants, the gathering was the largest in the history of the Network. However, the conference was also significant for its programming, which included an emphasis upon the use of various media to enhance the teaching of Asia.

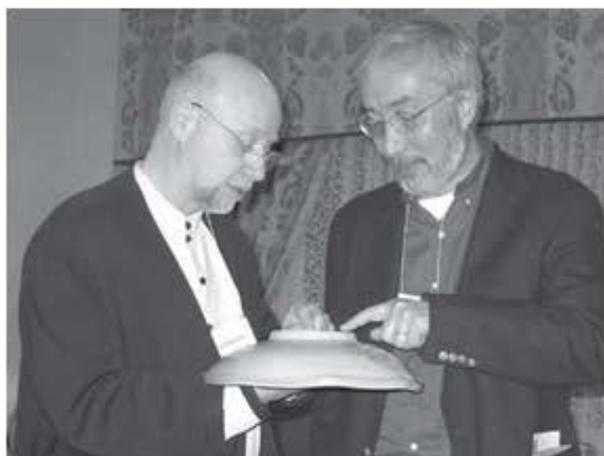
**Richard Bresnahan** (see photo), who delivered the conference's initial

keynote address, set the tone for the event when he described how he molded ancient Japanese pottery-making techniques together with his unique aesthetic perspective to create the artistic pieces that have won him world renown and the prestigious title of "Master Potter." Bresnahan's vision includes combining an appreciation for Japanese cultural sensibilities with a commitment to environmental sustainability. Saturday evening's keynote by *PBS* journalist **Fred de Sam Lazaro** described the challenges—and satisfaction—he has found in bringing stories of Asia to American audiences through the modern medium of television.

A number of other outstanding presentations from the conference appear in this issue—all centering on the use of electronic and print media.

**John Williams**, for example, describes how he has encouraged students to make their own short video documentaries as they conduct research about modern Chinese history. In so doing, they learn how to evaluate historical photographs in ways that are reminiscent of the methods professional historians employ in their evaluation of written sources.

Panel members **Hong Jiang**, **Tamara Bentley**, and **Rashna Singh** examine how the use of word and image can be creatively employed to teach about Asia. Professors Jiang and Bentley describe how they have developed a team-taught course focusing upon the interconnections between Chinese poetry and art, culminating in



*Between conference sessions, Keynote speaker and Master Potter, Richard Bresnahan, and ASIANetwork Board member, Jim Kodera, discuss the making of one of Bresnahan's pieces.* (Photo by Diane Clayton)

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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).<sup>9</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

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

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

<sup>5</sup> New York: CEL Educational Resources, 1986.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>9</sup> 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.

(continued from page 4)

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