

Asia for Educators (AFE) Web site

By: James A. Anderson

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Article:

With the recent proliferation of Web-based secondary materials and primary source databases pertaining to Asian Studies, both researchers and instructors are now freer than ever to seek out information online. But, do these resources alone make one a more savvy consumer of this cornucopia of information on Asia? I would suggest that the opposite may be the case, particularly when we ask our students to do the searching. Raw data without contextual information can lead to ambivalent or misinformed conclusions. Moreover, the easy availability of primary source materials used to fuel research do not always serve the needs of educators, who may be lecturing on certain matters outside their areas of expertise, and therefore would benefit from the guidance and discernment of colleagues working in these other fields. As a promising solution to online "information overload" in Asian Studies, I would offer Columbia University's Web site *Asia for Educators* (AFE), which draws on the expertise of researchers from various fields of Asian studies to provide detailed evidence and context for a wide range of topics covered in classrooms from secondary through post-graduate levels of instruction.

The overall layout of the AFE site is clear and easily navigable. I quickly intuited the site's basic contents through its short headings and associated images. Digging deeper into its contents, I also realized that some elements of the site were still "works in progress." Several links to lesson plans and central themes, for example, led to incomplete pages. However, the strength of the site as a teaching tool and as a source of information and structure for the development of new courses quickly becomes clear. From the array of lesson plans, timelines, and the currently featured course modules for a range of themes in Chinese history, the arrangement of the material linked to this Web site makes it easy for an instructor to conduct properly focused searches for information. When it comes to my own teaching, I find many applications for the material in this Web site. I now require that students in my large "East Asia to 1800" lecture survey class make frequent use of the timelines and featured modules on Chinese history and East Asian geography. I know that I will find the "Special Topic Guide" materials on the Silk Road to be particularly useful in my Silk Road survey course. Although I have in past courses created links to many of the Web-based sites referenced here, I found these materials to be conveniently arranged "one-stop shopping" for Silk Road images.

In terms of Web design, the site's compilers have handled the matter of historical periodization adroitly. At the top of the main Web page one finds a section titled "Resources Organized by World History Time Period:" useful for both instructors of world history and teachers designing regional Asian courses. Click on the link "4000 to 1000 BCE: Early Civilizations and the Emergence of Pastoral Peoples:" and one is taken to a single site for East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia in this period. Here, the instructor can take a regional "snapshot" for a specific moment in history and comment on similarities and differences across Asia's earliest centers of human settlement. For example, through this combined timeline I discovered a good deal more about the early Indus Valley than I have ever incorporated in my lectures, and I intend to pursue such regional comparisons in the future with the use of this combined timeline and its links.

When accessing the individual country timelines separately, mustard-colored links provide more information about the four areas of Asia profiled on the site. The main Chinese timeline, when used in tandem with the auxiliary timelines for particular periods, is also very useful. Appended to the Chinese timeline, I'm certain that students will enjoy the mnemonic "Dynasties Song," set to the melody of "Frère Jacques" if they wish to commit to memory the traditional periodization of Chinese history, the dynastic orders of Imperial China. I have a few changes to recommend regarding the individual country timelines. In the timeline for Vietnamese history, while most of the Chinese language terms are rendered in pinyin Romanization, the toponym for ancient northern Việt Nam is written as "Chiao Chih," rather than Jiaozhi. This small change would make this otherwise extremely useful timeline wholly consistent. Moreover, the otherwise very clear Korean timeline could contain a bit more detail to better distinguish each historical period, but this is a small matter.

ASIA FOR EDUCATORS
FOR STUDENTS & EDUCATORS AT ALL LEVELS

resources organized by world history time period

to 4000 BCE	1000 BCE - 300 CE		
300 - 600 CE	600 - 1000 CE	1000 - 1450 CE	1450 - 1750
1750 - 1919	1900 - 1950	21st Century	

related resources

OMuRAA
ONLINE MUSEUM RESOURCES on ASIAN ART

courses for educators

New ONLINE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSES

CERTIFICATE PROGRAM IN TEACHING CHINESE TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

related links

TRAVEL & SCHOOL EXCHANGE PROGRAMS
LANGUAGE NETWORK RESOURCES
HOSTING TEACHERS **NATIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR TEACHING ABOUT ASIA**
LINKS TO OTHER ASIAN STUDIES RESOURCES **ASIA IN THE CURRICULUM (AIC) BULLETIN**
LINKS TO RESOURCES FOR OTHER WORLD AREAS **EDUCATION ABOUT ASIA MAGAZINE**

The Asia for Educators home page at <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/>.

Considering the Web site as a whole, I have a few more miscellaneous changes to suggest. In the Elementary Level Resources section, I clicked on the link to a video demonstrating the use of chopsticks, but the video did not open properly in my browser, which is a common problem faced in using software across operating systems. Not being a technical guru myself, I cannot usefully suggest how one might avoid such glitches. In the section on Korea entitled "East Asia in Geographic Perspective," some of the links to original sites are broken. This change in linked materials is inevitable, but perhaps more frequent link checks by the Web-masters would help to keep these materials current.

Providing all of this information in a single Web site is quite an achievement. I applaud the efforts of the AFE developers and all of the contributors for the creation of an excellent resource for use across a board range of topics in Asian Studies. Among the "Related Links" at the foot of the main page, I found information about travel, school exchanges, and even hosting teachers from abroad to be informative and even inspiring. Beyond its usefulness in the classroom, this site could be used to plan for other cultural activities on campus, and even for collaboration with Asian institutions to exchange teachers and foster institutional links for the benefit of students and faculty alike. In this way, the Web site furthers the goal of internationalizing education in an interconnected world.