Living Beijing: Encountering the Asian City through Digital Storytelling

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More college students than ever are heading to Chinese cities to spend weeks or months learning Chinese history, culture, and language. And more than ever they and their instructors are bringing with them an array of digital devices, from still cameras to video cameras to laptop computers. Whether on campus or while studying abroad, many of these students will learn about China by analyzing examples of Chinese cinema. But with digital recording and editing equipment right at their fingertips, why not invite them to plunge into China's history and culture firsthand as they produce their own digital stories right in the midst of the country itself?

This essay explains one approach to how a course integrating digital video and audio technology can help students engage closely and thoughtfully with local cultures. The ideas I present are based on my own experience leading several study abroad trips—the most recent and successful in spring 2010—during which students learned about Beijing by creating their own digital stories on site in that city. What I hope to show is how the general principles structuring such a course, for the most part adaptable to other cities and other topics, can help students confront and rethink some of the stubborn dichotomies that subconsciously shape understanding of other cultures, including China's. To be clear, this is not a course on filmmaking or video production. In fact, I have received no special training in those areas beyond the sort of media analysis one learns as an academic in the humanities. Rather, I point one way through

the seemingly formidable, but far from insurmountable, challenges that an instructor interested in cinematic analysis and trained in the Chinese humanities or social sciences will likely confront when asking students to apply digital media toward guided exploration and analysis of China's historical and contemporary experience.

The specific course from which I have developed—and continue to develop—these approaches is called "The Chinese City: Living Beijing." I have offered it three times since 2003, the second two times in 2004 and 2010, when it comprised two discrete segments: an on-campus portion which met on a half-schedule during the regular semester, and an off-campus "extended study" segment during which students and I visited Beijing for three weeks in May and June 2010. The course is structured such that the on-campus portion builds historical and conceptual knowledge of Beijing, develops technical skills with digital media through technology workshops, and helps students devise and propose final projects in the form of digital stories—sometimes referred to as "new media narratives"— that take on the course's central theme, "continuities in transition." The final, on-site portion of the course grants students a broad measure of independence to complete their final projects in the field, and culminates in a screening of their finished products at the end of our tour.

To be sure, a course like this asks a lot of the instructor. Not just technology intensive, it also calls for a good deal of "stretch" among a variety of multidisciplinary course materials, not to mention a willingness to take on the fluid and often demanding circumstances of planning and executing off-campus study. That said, it is important to keep in mind that this kind of academically oriented digital storytelling allows for much flexibility: it can be integrated at a degree that matches one's comfort level, tailored to mesh with one's own field of interest and expertise, and does not necessarily even have to be coupled with an overseas study tour. Moreover, you are likely to find support for such experiments from your institution's information technology staff, who are typically looking for ways to work

with faculty on new learning initiatives. Finally, I can say from my own experience that the ease of using digital technology—both hardware and software—has increased exponentially between my first off-campus experiment with Living Beijing in 2004 and the most recent offering six years later. Similarly, online digital resources for the course, in the form of historical image databases and Creative Commons, have greatly expanded in the past several years, making the collection of digitized materials much easier. Both these trends promise to continue. What has not and will not change, however, is the challenge of teaching historical awareness, research methodologies, effective expression, and ethical representation of others. The spread of digital media impacts all of these, thus the importance of making it a larger part of liberal arts education.

Setting a Theme, Dissolving Dichotomies

Directly or indirectly, all the methods and materials included in Living Beijing point toward the making of the students' final projects: historically textured, intellectually sound new media narratives on topics that the students, as individuals, have a personal investment in learning more about. Course content, then, is quite varied in terms of genre and media, such that when the time comes to propose the final digital project around halfway or two-thirds into the semester, the students, either individually or in pairs, have had their interest sparked by a specific topic or issue.[1] Thematic unity for such wide-ranging content, and for the equally wide-ranging subjects of the students' final projects, comes from the course's central problematic: continuities in transition. For this course, continuities in transition means exploring how, over time, historical actors involved with the urban milieu now known as Beijing have constructed and reconstructed that city's identity. Beyond providing a center of gravity to the course, this theme also helps foreground the inadequacy of some of the entrenched preconceptions that unconsciously structure understandings of China, namely, the opposition of past and present, the notion of authentic "Chineseness," and the seemingly irresistible but often

misleading distinction between the traditional and the modern. Some elements of the on-campus portion of the course—such as lecture, discussion, and a research paper—are quite conventional; the on- and off-campus digital media assignment, on the other hand, is decidedly less so. Bringing the two together can be tricky, but is essential when laying the groundwork for successful independent fieldwork.

Whatever the potential for learning and insight that digital technology may bring, good old-fashioned lectures do the work of giving Living Beijing its foundation and direction. Most of the lectures address the dichotomies listed above while preparing students to think about and discuss the course's readings and visual materials. Thus, for instance, a brief introductory lecture linked to Mike Meyer's book of scholar-journalism *The Last Days of Old Beijing*, points out how modern commentators, both Chinese and western have, over and again, been rather sad witnesses to the imminent disappearance of "old Beijing." The message here—which I like to reinforce by reflecting out loud on my own conflicted sense of nostalgia while visiting Beijing over the past 20 years or more—is to beware the narrative of loss, and more specifically, to keep in mind how the city we see today, which seems to have irrevocably destroyed so much of its historical identity through modernization and "westernization," will within the students' own lifetime acquire its own historical aura and become an object of evocative longing. The point here is to break down the imagined differences between the past, the present, and even the future so that students can begin to question the familiar, but intellectually restrictive and usually quite disappointing, quest for Chinese authenticity.

Another way to destabilize the search for Beijing's Chinese authenticity, also built into the lecture component of the course, is to stress how, despite the eminently "Chinese" cosmological structure that scholars like Jeffrey F. Meyer see "built into" Beijing's architectural layout, the city has had non-Han Chinese rulers—the Khitan, Jurchen, Mongol, and Manchu—for nearly two-thirds of its thousand-year history as an imperial capital.[2] Similarly, the very location of Beijing—the "northern capital"—

derived from the Han Chinese Ming dynasty ruler Yongle's desire to create a border city that straddled the non-Han nomadic regions to the north and China's cultural heartland to the south. More, as a capital city, Beijing has long been a magnet for peoples from elsewhere, including Persian, Arab, and Central Asian scholars and architects, diplomatic missions from areas bordering the Chinese empire, Jesuit missionaries, and, of course, peoples from China's own internally varied cultural geography. The city's fictional world, too, is populated by migrants drawn by the magnetism of Beijing, with the most famous example being the country boy turned rickshaw puller Camel Xiangzi, the protagonist of Lao She's panoramic 1930s novel *Rickshaw* (Luotuo xiangzi).[3] Contemporary documentary films also highlight the continuing pull of Beijing as a cultural mecca. In his documentary *Swing in Beijing* (2000), for example, Shuibo Wang interviews a series of musicians, artists, filmmakers, and playwrights all drawn to the city's rich potential for performance, exhibition, inspiration, and intellectual exchange. Beijing, in other words, has long been a site of negotiation between the local and the non-local, as well as a place whose power, prestige, wealth, and cultural resources have attracted and assimilated peoples from near and far. Such features define the city's heterogeneity to this day, and can lead students, in the making of their digital stories, to reflect critically on their own sojourn to Beijing as seekers of personal enrichment.

Integrating Theme and Media

Beijing's long and mutable identity as a melting pot of peoples and cultures also helps complicate the compulsion to categorize things seen and heard in China as either "traditional" or "modern." Potentially even more effective in this regard is the topic of urban space. Lecture, reading, and discussion on representations of urban space can go far toward questioning this dichotomy, and there is no shortage of excellent materials to choose from.[4] But in a course that culminates in the making of new media narratives, why not kill two birds with one stone by selecting written and visual materials that students can use

to create short and relatively straightforward "training" videos? For instance, one of the early units in Living Beijing integrates written and visual materials into the making of digital stories that recreate the pre-modern Chinese urban space in the famous Song dynasty hand scroll, *Spring on the River* (Qingming Shanghe Tu). The unit itself comprises several components: a

Figure 1: Detail from the Spring on the River hand scroll (Qingming shanghe tu).

lecture based on a full-length digital version of the scroll, conceptual and historical readings, a technology workshop on basic video editing, and two assignments that ask students to produce and write about their own digital representations of the scroll. Where the lecture and historical readings present scholarly interpretations and basic aesthetic principles of *Spring on the River*, the conceptual readings introduce a vocabulary for talking about how urban space is constructed and experienced. Thus an excerpt from Kevin Lynch's seminal study of urban space, *The Image of the City*, makes available the theoretical terms "paths," "edges," "districts," "nodes," and "landmarks." A very brief (two-page) but highly evocative excerpt on "keynote sounds," "signal sounds," and "soundmarks" from R. Murray Schaefer's classic *The Tuning of the World* encourages students to think about the city space as an aurally experienced "soundscape." Finally, a chapter from Jianfei Zhu's *Architecture of China* provides theoretical analysis of the pre-Cartesian spatial logic of Chinese urban space depicted in the scroll.[5]

The two assignments in this unit both rely on the high-resolution images of the *Qingming Shanghe Tu* provided in

the online version of Valerie Hansen's *The Qingming Scroll and Its Significance for the Study of Chinese History.*[6] The first—and quite simple—assignment asks students to "grab" (by simply pushing the "shift-apple-4" keys on a Macintosh computer) several detail images from the scroll, paste them into a word processing document, and briefly analyze them using the unit's historical and theoretical ideas. For the second, more involved assignment, students attend a technology workshop where they learn the basic video editing skills needed to create two- to-three-minute digital stories. Working with their own selection of high resolution still images from the digitized scroll, and with audio clips downloaded from the Creative Commons Freesound.org database, students work in pairs to develop a poetic theme, narrative line, or even an interpretive argument derived from their personal, but informed, understanding of the scroll.[7]

While one might ask students to add explanatory off-screen narration, I have found it more constructive if the stories "show" rather than "tell." This way, students have to express their ideas and themes solely through thoughtful coordination of images (zooms, pans, transitions, etc.) and sound (volume, timing). Leaving the words out of the video challenges students to work directly with nonverbal visual and aural rhetoric as a medium for communicating ideas, constructing arguments, and representing space—not to mention encouraging them to master useful editing functions of the software. Verbal explanation of the digital stories can be required in the form of accompanying essays, individually written, in which students account for their digital stories' compositional choices. Separating the digital and written components also makes evaluation of the assignment more meaningful, as it gives the instructor a clearer sense of the larger process behind the "making of" each digital story (more on this later), not to mention the degree to which students have worked to assimilate reading and lecture materials in their own creative adaptations of the scroll.

Aside from learning to create their own short digital stories, students can also learn much, both conceptually and practically, from viewing film documentaries. Once again, there is no lack

of documentary cinema available to teach about Beijing, or for that matter China in general. But whatever the topic of one's course, it again makes sense to choose materials that build toward several goals at the same time. For a course like Living Beijing that culminates in a digital story project, films should both introduce the history of the city and raise awareness of the art of documentary itself. The former aspect provides the all-important "content" that structures any course while also providing topical points of departure for students' own final projects. The latter aspect raises awareness of documentary film's constructedness as it points toward the formal options available for constructing their own projects. An excellent resource here is the book *Introduction to Documentary*, in which film scholar Bill Nichols details the various "modes" that have defined documentary film's development through the twentieth century.[8] Because of its overwhelming dominance on television and in educational films, student documentaries tend to gravitate toward the "expository mode," which stresses logical argument and "a voice-of-God" verbal commentary accompanied by supporting imagery. While there is nothing wrong with the expository style, it should not be allowed to crowd out other approaches, such as the "poetic mode," which emphasizes mood or tone through ambiguous but potentially rich association and patterning; the "observational mode," which eschews supplementary music, sound effects, and voiceover in favor of a seemingly objective recording of life "as it happens" in front of the camera; or the "participatory mode," where the filmmaker steps out in front of the camera to interview and interact with his or her subjects.[9]

One can show clips of classic examples of each mode in class during lecture or, if you are comfortable with "small-screen" viewing, assign them on YouTube if what you need is available there, or through your own institution's online streaming video.[10] There is, however, no substitute for full-length screenings of documentaries themselves. For Living Beijing, the panoramic 1995 documentary *Gate of Heavenly Peace*, which traces the development and suppression of the 1989

protest movement, serves as an informative and compelling sample of expository filmmaking. An excellent example of participatory documentary is *Meishi Street* (2006), a film in which the director hands the video camera to a Beijing restaurateur whose neighborhood is being torn down to widen a street in the run-up to the 2008 Olympic games. The other documentary I have tried, *Swing in Beijing*, demonstrates how Nichols' modes are frequently combined in a single film. The director of *Swing* mixes elements of the expository, observational, and poetic modes by letting Beijing-based artists "speak for themselves," without off-screen narration, in a series of interviews interspersed with expository-style backup footage and impressionistic montage sequences. I have found that these "sample" documentaries used in the course can have a direct influence on the students' final projects, sometimes moving them toward exploring certain topics, but more often guiding them stylistically at the fieldwork stage, during the process of gathering and editing material. At this point, students find themselves either choosing among or forced into identifiable documentary modes based on personal inclination, practical limitations, and the nature of their subject. Theory, in other words, informs concrete practice, and students learn firsthand how documentary filmmakers negotiate the border between representation and "reality."

Developing and Evaluating Digital Stories

Obviously, there is an entire raft of practical and ethical issues involved in preparing and executing digital stories in a foreign country. How does one steer students toward choosing the "right" project? How coordinate with technology and library staff? How does one anticipate potential ethical considerations? And finally, what standards can be used to evaluate digital stories?

First, the selection and development of the final digital storytelling projects depend, of course, on the subject matter of the course. In general, it is simplest to assign students to explore a relatively specific, specialized topic—most likely aligned with

one's own area of expertise. Such an approach has the advantage of providing disciplinary depth. The disadvantage of a more narrow topical focus—and this can be crucial to the success of digital storytelling projects—is that it might limit opportunities for students to choose a subject with which they can identify personally. In Living Beijing, I aim for a middle ground by opening up the field to any plausible and potentially meaningful topic, as long as it relates to Beijing and incorporates the "continuities in transition" theme. Next, as with any substantial research project, the assignment as a whole is broken down into several distinct stages: 1) a short pre-proposal, due around mid-term, describing the basic idea for the project, its proposed use of digital media, and an annotated bibliography; 2) a "researched proposal" that includes a formal research paper on the history of the topic along with a narrative description of how the students plan to carry out the project itself on site, and; 3) a final oral presentation of the project at the end of the regular semester, during which students might present digital "rough cuts" drawing from materials available on line (as opposed to gathered on site in Beijing).

Students receive feedback, from the instructor and their classmates, at each stage. Guidance is probably most crucial, however, for the pre-proposal, as it is here that the instructor can intervene most effectively to shape a project's eventual success. There may be feasibility problems, such as a proposal to carry out man-on-the-street interviews right in Tiananmen Square, which would surely be squelched by security, or, more commonly, proposals that overreach in their ambition to "cover" impossibly broad swaths of urban geography. Other proposals may seem valid on paper, but would end up unrewarding in practice, like a pair of students who initially proposed studying consumer habits in Beijing's KFC outlets. After I pointed out that they might regret spending their valuable time abroad cooped up in fast-food outlets, they came back with a second proposal: to explore the developing music scene in Beijing—a much better idea, not just because I lack expertise in sociological methodology, but because the topic is more city-specific and,

crucially, because both were accomplished jazz musicians who could and did use their instruments and musical talent to open doors and make friends in places ranging from a tranquil *guqin* studio to wild punk rock clubs. In general, one should expect students' digital stories to evolve, often quite drastically, through initial conception up to the last stages of touch-up editing. It is precisely through the bumps and jolts of revision, however, that students come to understand the unpredictable nature of field research, as well as the intellectual rewards that come from head-on encounters between preconceptions and on-the-ground "reality."

Digital storytelling projects require not just close planning and coordination with students, but also with the technology and library staff, and in the case of ethical considerations, your school's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Especially when it comes to technical issues, the earlier you can begin consulting with support staff, the better. Not only will there be a schedule of workshops to set up, but you and the tech staff will need time to match equipment needs with the technical ambitions of the course. For example, will the digital stories be limited to still photos and audio, or will students be encouraged to take on the more complex technical demands of video production? (I would recommend the former, for simplicity's sake) What kind of software will the students be using, and how will it be made available to them both on campus and off? What elements of digital hardware will you and the students need to borrow, and when will you need them? Coordinating with library staff will likely be less intensive, but essential to confronting issues of source documentation and media literacy. By nature, media projects immerse students in the potentially murky world of digital downloading. Library staff, when contacted in a timely way, can provide structured guidance in the accurate and responsible use of the copyrighted and Creative Commons materials available to students through Internet searches as well as the expanding realm of online image and audio databases (see Selected Online Resources below for a sampling of both). As for issues of ethical research practices, institutional review

boards at colleges and universities provide guidelines for research involving human subjects. Normally, course-based student research projects are exempt from IRB review. But all the same, the IRB can advise on matters such as interview consent procedures, limitations on public viewing, and the like.[11]

One of the more daunting questions confronting instructors, not to mention students, regarding new media projects is how to evaluate them, especially when neither the instructor nor the student is a video artist or filmmaker, and the course itself focuses not on professional mastery of digital media, but its use as a means to achieve broader educational ends. One of the most comprehensive guides to assessment of new media narratives can be found in Jason Ohler's book *Digital Storytelling in the Classroom*, as well as on the accompanying website, JasonOhler.com. Ohler breaks evaluation down into a list of over a dozen optional "assessment traits," ranging from project planning and research through originality, voice, economy, pacing, source documentation, and what he calls "media grammar," that is, the way image, audio, editing, and overall organization contribute, or detract, from, the telling of the digital narrative.[12] The overarching goal here, Ohler emphasizes, is to "assess the process" as fairly as possible by recognizing the many varieties and levels of effort that go into creating such projects.

As mentioned above regarding the students' Qingming Scroll videos, one way to sharpen the assessment process is to require written "making of" assignments alongside the digital stories. For the final, on-site projects completed in Beijing, written work supplements digital work from start to finish. Even before stepping onto the plane, students have mapped out their projects in a series of proposals and research papers. While on site, students can also be required to submit regularly a written record of their project-related activities—that is, a detailed log of where they went, whom they met, the difficulties they encountered, the solutions they came up with, and so on. The "back stories" that emerge in the logs can, in fact, reveal more about what students actually learned about their topics than the media

projects themselves, which on their own represent only a very narrow cross-section of the learning experience. More practically, if a student cannot bring the digital project to final completion due to, say, illness or a disastrous loss of data, the log can serve as substantive, alternate grounds for evaluation. Also when on site, it is important to schedule at least one "rough-cut" screening for peer-review, as well as several individual meetings—formal and/or informal—to monitor and guide projects, especially in the final draft stages, when a few well-placed suggestions and easy edits can make a vast difference in the quality of the completed digital narratives.

Conclusion: Extended Encounters

   Three weeks is not a lot of time for novice videographers to shoot, edit, script, and polish a documentary, especially in foreign, unfamiliar territory, and in tandem with group tours and several guest lectures. But with good planning, realistic expectation, and a bit of luck, it can be done. The videos from our spring 2010 trip (seven of which can be viewed in streaming video; see Selected Online Resources) are a mix of the raw and the cooked; yet they all attest to the variety of personally engaged, educational encounters that students can carry out in a large, culturally dynamic city like Beijing. Some of the projects evolved directly out of students' individual personal hobbies, skills, and family history; others led students into entirely new zones of knowledge. Regarding the former, I was able to pair up one student who had an interest in children's drama with another interested in migrant workers by putting them in touch with the Beijing-based nongovernmental organization Hua Dan, which uses drama exercises to teach life skills to migrant-workers' schoolchildren. Another two—who between them had combined fluency in English, Mandarin, French, and Spanish—created a poetic and poly-lingual exploration of people's reactions to what was then the latest addition to historical monuments on Tiananmen Square: a pair of massive video screens. Then there was the student who, having discovered that his great-great-grandfather had been an officer in the

American forces of the Second Relief Expedition during the 1900 Boxer Rebellion, designed a project that retraced his ancestor's journey through that tumultuous event. As for encounters with the entirely new, a pair of seniors—one majoring in English and the other double majoring in Chinese and economics—centered their project on interviews with working artists at the Shangyuan Art Center, which brought them direct and memorable insight into the contestation and ambiguity behind the phrase "avant-garde Chinese art."

There is, of course, much more to discuss regarding the practical and conceptual approaches to directing student new media projects in Beijing, China, or for that matter anywhere in Asia or the world.[13] It should be clear by now that setting up a course that integrates digital media into the study abroad experience presents the instructor with new and possibly unfamiliar challenges, some of which I myself have yet to resolve. On the other hand, once on site in Beijing, or wherever your teaching interest leads, you will find yourself in the enviable role of facilitator, with the educational heavy lifting being done not by you, but by the inexhaustibly rich milieu of the city itself.

Selected Online Resources

Colgate University Digital Media Services: Class Media Projects, "The Chinese City: Living Beijing." A Web page featuring streaming video versions of student projects from the May-June 2010 study tour discussed in this article.

http://www.colgate.edu/offices/support/informationtechnology/ faculty/resourcesfac/dmsfac/classmediaprojects/videonarrative/ archivedvideonarratives/beijingvideos

China Heritage Quarterly. An online journal, part of The Australian National University China Heritage Project, including a number of excellent articles on the history of Beijing, as well as a detailed summary from a scholarly conference on the *Qingming Shanghe Tu* (see No. 4, December 2005). http:// www.chinaheritagenewsletter.org/

The Freesound Project. A collaborative Creative Commons database for downloadable sounds, excluding music. http:// www.freesound.org/

George Ernest Morrison Collection. State Library, New South Wales. A digital archive that includes photographs from the life of the Australian traveler and journalist also known as "Morrison of Peking." Images of Beijing (and other locations) date from between about 1895 and 1920, with particular focus on the Boxer Rebellion and Foreign Legation Quarter. http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/index.html

Google Books. A good resource for non-copyrighted, 19th-century accounts of travel to Beijing, locatable through an advanced search for full-view books on "Peking." http://books.google.com/

The Hedda Morrison Photographs of China, 1933-1946. A searchable database of historical images of Beijing and environs from between 1933 and 1946. http://hcl.harvard.edu/libraries/harvard-yenching/collections/morrison/

Sidney D. Gamble Photographs. Duke University Libraries, Digital Collections. An easily searchable image database that includes many images of Beijing from between 1917 and 1932. http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/gamble/.

Visualizing Cultures: Image-driven Scholarship. A component of MIT's Open Courseware system specifically designed as a Creative Commons resource for education about East Asia. Currently expanding to include more rare, high-resolution historical images of China and other regions in East Asia. http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/home/index.html

Endnotes

[1] I have found that digital media projects work best when students collaborate in pairs. Individual students can be hesitant to explore a foreign environment, while groups of three can have difficulty coordinating with one another. Pairs, on the other hand, tend to offer mutual support to one another when developing projects, doing fieldwork, and resolving technical problems. Except for the researched proposal, however, written assignments are done individually. It also bears mention that for the instructor, group work helps keep the total number of projects manageable. Regarding language skills, independent fieldwork is, of course, much easier and rewarding when students have relevant training. I was fortunate to be able to select students who, except for one, had had some Chinese language background.

[2] Jeffrey F. Meyer, The Dragons of Tiananmen: Beijing as a Sacred City (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1991).

[3]Rickshaw: The Novel Lo To Hsiangtzu, translated by Jeanne James (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1979).

[4]Please refer to my syllabus for The Chinese City: Living Beijing, downloadable where this essay is listed under "Articles," at http://www.colgate.edu/academics/FacultyDirectory/jcrespi.html

[5]Kevin Lynch, The Image of the City (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT. Press, 1960); R. Murray Schaefer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1977); Jianfei Zhu, *Architecture of China: A Historical Critique.* (London; New York Routledge, 2009).

[6] Valerie Hansen, The Beijing Qingming Scroll and its Significance for the Study of Chinese History. http://www.yale.edu/history/faculty/materials/hansen-qingming-scroll.html. The full-length PDF of the scroll I use in class and provide to students is available for download at my Colgate faculty profile site (see note 4 above). I also show students a full-size reproduction of the scroll to provide a feel for the scale and format of the original painting.

[7]We used FinalCut Express as our video editing software. Your own technology services staff may recommend and support different editing tools.

[8]Bill Nichols, Introduction to Documentary (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

[9]Nichols develops two more modes, the "reflexive" and "performative," the former foregrounding the constructedness of documentary itself, and the latter—often autobiographical—stressing the filmmaker's subjective, personal experience in the documentary process. These two modes can be included, but in the interests of relevance, simplicity, and time saving, I left them out.

[10]Nichols lists examples for films from each mode. A classic example of the poetic mode is Godfrey Reggio's 1982 film Koyaanisqatsi; the observational mode, Frederick Wiseman's 1968 film High School; and for the participatory mode any of Michael Moore's films. Examples of expository documentary are virtually everywhere (nature documentaries, news documentaries, etc.), but the locus classicus of this mode is the work of Scottish filmmaker John Grierson. Of course, eventually one can also screen students' digital stories from previous classes for modeling purposes.

[11]Note that it is also important to obtain the students' consent for the university or other institution to post or otherwise screen the videos, ideally with a signed release agreement.

[12]Jason Ohler, "Art, Storytelling, Technology and Education Resources for Educators, Parents, Innovators." http://www.jasonohler.com/storytelling/index.cfm. Ohler's book (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 2008) provides an excellent general guide through the methods and pitfalls of using new media narrative as an educational tool. For his discussion of assessment, see pp. 177-191. Perhaps the best way to understand what students put into digital media projects is for instructors to create their own model projects ahead of time as part of course preparation work. Your own institution's digital media support staff can assist. Or if you are more ambitious, you can find funding for a workshop by an organization like The Center of Digital Storytelling based in Berkeley, Calif., *www.storycenter.org/.*

[13]Previous issues of *AsiaNetwork Exchange* are, of course, an excellent resource for practical knowledge related to what I discuss here. On student production of short video documentaries from digitized historical images, see John Williams, "Making History with Digital Video: Student Documentaries from Photo to Film" (vol. 14, no. 1). For firsthand advice on collaboration with colleagues on study-abroad trips, see contributions by Sun Weijie, Jonathan Marshall, and James G. Lochtefeld (vol. 18, no. 1). These three articles would be essential if you plan to co-teach on site with, say, a colleague with specific expertise in video art. Steven Emmanuel's article on a combined student research, documentary film-making trip to Vietnam (vol. 17, no. 2) describes a quite different approach to the kind of engaged learning we pursue in the Living Beijing course.