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DIGITAL ASIA

Notes from the Editors

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The articles in this special issue expand upon the pedagogical research presented at the 25th Annual ASIANetwork Conference, “Digital and Beyond: Ways of Knowing Asia” in their examination of the productive relationship between digital technology and Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

Keywords: digital media; critical making; universal design

We are extremely excited to publish this special issue on Digital Asia under the guest editorship of Dr. Susan Westhafer Furukawa and Dr. Erin Schoneveld. This special issue grew out of the hugely successful ASIANetwork Annual Conference in 2017 themed “Digital and Beyond: Ways of Knowing Asia”. Chaired by Chris Herrick, then Vice Chair of the ASIANetwork Board of Directors, the 2017 ASIANetwork Conference focused on digital technologies for teaching and doing research in Asia. The conference attracted diverse and innovative panels and individual papers that explored the incorporation of digital media and technologies in the pedagogy and research of Asia.

Highlights of the 2017 ASIANetwork Conference included the inspiring keynote speeches by Dr. Peter Bol of Harvard University and Dr. Sumathi Ramaswami of Duke University. Dr. Peter Bol is the Vice Provost for Advances in Learning at Harvard, responsible for HarvardX, and the Harvard Initiative in Learning, Teaching and Research that connects online and residential learning. His keynote speech is titled “Specialization, Paradigms and Tools: Why the Digital is Changing Teaching and Research in Asia.” Dr. Ramaswami is a cultural historian of South Asia at Duke University who co-established *Tasveerghar, A Digital Network of South Asian Popular Visual Culture*; her keynote speech is titled “The Unbearable Lightness of Image Travel”.

We are very grateful that both Dr. Bol and Dr. Ramaswami agreed to publish their keynote speeches for this special issue. And this is also the very first time that ASIANetwork Exchange is able to include keynote speeches of the ASIANetwork Annual Conference in our peer-reviewed journal.

The current special issue on Digital Asia came mostly from the panel “Digital Media and Critical Making: Universal Design in Teaching East Asia in the Liberal Arts Classroom” organized and chaired by Susan Furukawa of Beloit College and Erin Schoneveld of Haverford College. We would like to congratulate both of them for their hard work in both organizing the panel and putting this special issue together.

Due to the success of the 2017 ASIANetwork Conference theme and the strong interest in further exploring the potential of incorporating digital technologies in teaching and researching, ASIANetwork’s Board of Directors voted at its most

recent board meeting in September 2018, to continue the Digital Asia Initiative. The ASIANetwork Digital Asia Initiative will provide workshops for member faculty in the use of digital technologies in teaching and research. Please contact Chris Herrick at herrick@muhlenberg.edu if anyone is interested in participating or acting as a mentor for an ASIANetwork workshop.

–Marsha Smith and Hong Zhang, Editors

Introduction to the Special Edition on Digital Asia

The makeup of today's liberal arts college student body is becoming more and more diverse with an increase in international students, first-generation college students, and students with declared disabilities. Within this context, it is imperative that faculty consider new methods of assessment that address the diverse learning environments in which we teach. The articles in this special issue seek to do just that by expanding upon the pedagogical research presented at the 25th Annual ASIANetwork Conference, "Digital and Beyond: Ways of Knowing Asia" in their examination of the productive relationship between digital technology and Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

The special-issue theme of "Digital Asia" highlights a wide range of approaches used to represent and examine rapid economic, social, political, and environmental changes and their impacts on Asian cultures. These methods are comprised of both traditional academic disciplines as well as digital technologies that simultaneously allow for the preservation of existing information as well as the creation and sharing of new data, texts, and images resulting in original ways of analyzing and constructing Asia. Within this context, UDL offers strategies for faculty to design curricula that stimulate interest in differentiating the ways students are able express what they know. UDL is a set of principles for course development that provides all students with equal opportunities to learn. UDL seeks to improve and optimize existing methods, materials, and assessments that meet the needs of all students. When UDL principles are used in association with digital technology, a greater range of access points is created to help students understand, navigate, and engage with their environment. Yet, it is important to keep in mind that the goal of UDL is to create

learning environments for all students to have the opportunity to become “expert learners.” Therefore, whether those methods engage with digital technology or more traditional modes of assessment such as exams and papers, all should be embraced.

While varied in content and methodology, all seven essays engage with active and experiential learning projects and assessment strategies that incorporate both traditional academic disciplines as well as digital technologies with the concept of UDL. More broadly, each of these essays seeks to explore ways to make learning more accessible to all students in the classroom through a range of varied approaches leading to a greater understanding of the possible digital and non-digital approaches to learning that can be utilized.

Article Summaries

Taking the theme of “Digital Asia” and the principles of UDL as our points of departure, the articles in this special issue introduce a wide range of approaches to teaching about Asia in the liberal arts classroom. Peter Bol’s keynote lecture retitled as “How the Digital is Changing Research and Teaching on Asia” focuses on tools built for scholarship in a digital environment allowing us to take more information into account, to share it more broadly, and to analyze it with greater precision. Sumathi Ramaswamy’s keynote lecture, “The Unbearable Lightness of Image Travel: The Work of Curation in the Digital Age” provides a discussion about the work of the image in our digital age, the challenges to traditional notions of bricks-and-mortar curatorship posed by digital humanities, and the digital proliferation of the image.

Our first essay, “Japanese Modernism Across Media” by Erin Schoneveld (Haverford College) expands upon Sumathi Ramaswamy’s keynote by exploring the pedagogical benefits of implementing a semester-long digital curation project using the open-source web-publishing platform Omeka Classic. Schoneveld’s essay examines Japan studies and visual studies pedagogy in relation to digital acts of making that revolve around the curation of virtual art exhibitions consisting of modern and contemporary Japanese art and visual culture.

Our second essay, “A Multimedia Approach to Teaching Japanese Popular Culture” by Susan Furukawa (Beloit College) introduces an asset-based approach to various

assignments and forms of assessment, while also challenging students to question their assumptions about various popular media that the course addresses. By using various forms of digital media to develop assignments that recognize the diversity of experience and learning styles students bring into the classroom, Furukawa creates an environment in which students can demonstrate their strengths, and experience more equitable engagement with class discussion and assignments.

Continuing the conversation of digital scholarship in East Asia, “The Chinese Poster Project: EALC Pedagogy and Digital Media” by Shiamin Kwa (Bryn Mawr College) and Anna-Alexandra Fodde-Reguer (Haverford College) examines connections between Chinese studies pedagogy and digital media through development of the “Chinese Poster Project.” Its later incarnations are now embedded in other coursework in Bryn Mawr’s Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures. The digital scholarship aspect of this poster project allows for the unique pedagogical advancement of history, politics, culture, language, and art in the modern Chinese context. Additionally, by using the web-publishing platform Omeka Classic to create an open-source website for the Chinese posters, the materials will remain an important resource and teaching tool for future courses that engage with Chinese art and visual culture.

Jennifer Prough (Valparaiso University) presents several methods for teaching students how to critically engage with images and certain forms of digital media from Japan in her essay, “Reading Images, Visualizing Texts: Teaching Visual Analysis in a Japanese Visual Culture Class.” Prough examines the pedagogical challenges of teaching a course comprised of students with a sincere interest in Japanese popular culture, but who lack a strong background in Japanese language and content courses. While these students are good at reading critically and analyzing texts, they are not equipped to turn those same analytical lenses to images. Through teaching engagement with images and the intertextuality between image and text through written and creative assignments, Prough encourages students to think more analytically about the popular culture they love.

Our final essay, “High-Impact Educational Practices, Universal Design and Assessment Opportunities in Liberal Arts Seminars” by Hilary Snow (University of

Wisconsin-Milwaukee), explores teaching East Asian art to cross-disciplinary students in small, seminar-style courses. Snow demonstrates pedagogical approaches for teaching beyond departmental boundaries and discusses successful assessment strategies.

We hope that our readers find this special issue on “Digital Asia” generative and inspiring as you continue to develop and connect Asian Studies research and pedagogy.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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