

News and Reviews

Vol. 4, No. 3
Spring 2001

Treasure the Treasures Series

The National Palace Museum: A Treasure-house of Chinese Art, A City of Cathay, The Dragon in Chinese Art

>> Produced by the National Palace Museum, Taiwan. 1999. CD-ROM available for Windows platform only.

These three CD-ROMs introduce users to the collections of the National Palace Museum in Taipei. The series surprises the user with ingenious approaches to the collections but frustrates because it lacks some simple features that would make the CDs much more practical for classroom application.

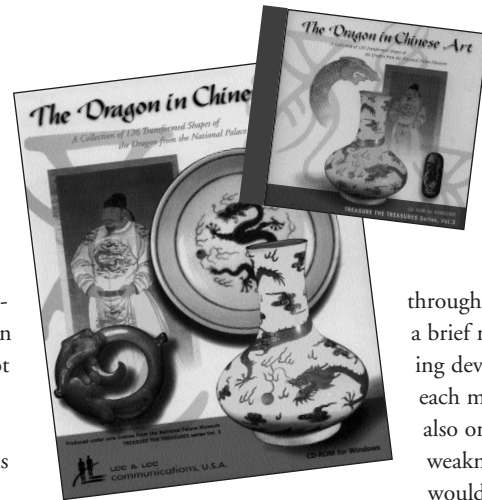
Review

Of the three, Volume Two, *A City of Cathay*, is probably the most suitable for classroom use.

The first of the series, *The National Palace Museum: A Treasure-house of Chinese Art*, surveys the museum's collections using three different interfaces. "The Story of the Museum" module presents four short documentary-style montages of still photographs narrating the origin, history, and mission of the museum. Each less than five minutes long, these montages (in particular the first two) put the museum in excellent historical con-

text and could be shown to classes on late imperial or modern Chinese history in both college and high school classrooms. Although the perspective is obviously from the Taiwan side of the straits, the narrative is not overtly biased (interestingly, despite the CD's Taiwanese origins, pinyin romanization is used throughout this CD, but not the others).

One can view the museum's collections directly via the "Antiquities" module. Clicking on the words "Chinese Art" on the CD's home page produces an icon menu listing twelve categories of Chinese art, including sculpture, painting, carving, jade, bronze, calligraphy, and the "Scholar's Studio." This approach would be the most appropriate for college or advanced high school teaching. The 136 different items are easily



accessible, either by chronological sequence or through hyperlinks from a brief narrative describing developments in each medium. This is also one of the CD's weaknesses, for it would be a much more

flexible teaching tool if a single menu listed all the available objects at once, enabling the instructor to move quickly between pieces. It is also frustrating that not all the objects hyperlinked in the text can be enlarged.

The objects are presented in excellent detail and can be magnified by one degree. However, the detail is so great that many of the paintings,

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COURTESY OF BULLFROG FILMS



Opium fields along the borders of China and Thailand, from *The Heroin Wars* trilogy. See review, page 4.

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Asian Educational Media Service

The Asian Educational Media Service (AEMS) is a program of the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. AEMS offers information about where to find audiovisual media resources for teaching and learning about Asia, and advice about which ones may best suit your needs. In addition to *AEMS News and Reviews*, published quarterly, services include a free call-in/write-in service and a Web site. To add your name to our mailing list, request additional copies of the newsletter to use in workshops or to share with your colleagues, or ask for help in locating resources, please contact us.

AEMS is made possible by generous support from The Freeman Foundation and The Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership.

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What's New?

Annual Board Meeting

On March 20, AEMS held its Annual Advisory Board Meeting in Chicago. Board members came from around the country to answer questions, give suggestions, and offer advice. New to the Board over the past year are Lucien Ellington, Editor of *Education About Asia*, and Ellen C.K. Johnson, Professor of Anthropology at the College of DuPage. They, along with the other Board members, brought with them lots of ideas and plenty of enthusiasm.

Among the ideas that we discussed were a series of teacher's guides to popular films and documentaries, an on-line database of images from Asia with accompanying text, and at least one screening series. I will write about all these projects in more detail in upcoming issues of this newsletter. As always, we welcome suggestions from readers.

Back issues available

Back issues of *News* and *Reviews* are taking up space in our offices and we would love to find them good homes! If you would like a hard copy of a newsletter you have seen on our Web site, or multiple copies for a conference, workshop or inservice, please call Sarah at 888-828-AEMS or e-mail aems@uiuc.edu. There is no charge for back issues. (*Sorry—Vol. 2, No. 2, Fall 1999 is not available.*)

Call for Submissions

The Spring 2002 issue of *Education About Asia*, the K–16 teaching journal of the Association for Asian Studies, will focus on teaching about Asia through films, both feature and documentary.

As visual resources become cheaper and more accessible, more and more educators are turning to films as learning materials. As guest editor of this issue, I hope to publish feature articles (1,000 to 3,000 words in length) and resource essays (750 to 1,800 words in length) that will illuminate creative ways of bringing Asia to the classroom through film and video resources. Prospective authors are encouraged to submit articles that not only recommend superlative films but that also consider the pedagogical methods that will enable teachers to make the most of these resources.

The intended audience is K–16 teachers. Wherever possible, articles should have broad applicability to large numbers of educators. Please see the following Web page for writer's guidelines:

<http://www.aasianst.org/ea-toc.htm>

If you would like to have a manuscript considered for publications, please submit TWO copies to EACH of the following:

Sarah Barbour, Program Coordinator
Asian Educational Media Service
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
805 West Pennsylvania Avenue
Urbana, IL 61801
Phone: (217) 265-0642
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E-mail: sibarbou@uiuc.edu

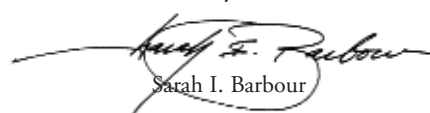
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615 McCallie Avenue
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The deadline is September 24, 2001.

Submissions by e-mail and fax are acceptable, but please call to make sure that the manuscripts have been received.

If you would like to discuss a possible manuscript idea or if you have other questions, please contact me either by phone or by e-mail.

Sincerely,



Sarah I. Barbour

New Video from the Media Production Group

Japanese as well as foreigners like to say that the Japanese are an “Island People,” uneasy about living overseas. But in today’s global era, sojourns abroad are becoming a normal part of life for Japanese as for people elsewhere. Maybe the real displaced persons in Japan today are those who have never lived under another sun?

A new documentary video program takes up that question. The program is being created by the Media Production Group (an affiliate of AEMS) jointly with faculty from the Department of Japanese Studies, National University of Singapore.

Under Another Sun: Singapore’s Japanese is a one-hour program that explores the tensions people feel between their attachments to their homeland and their desires to be freed from the burdens imposed by living at home. Taking Singapore as a case in point, the program profiles the activities of Japanese sojourners from several walks of life. The program also reports on shifts in the climate of sojourning over the 150-year history of Japanese involvement with Singapore.

Location filming for the program was completed in October of 2000. The program is being produced and designed by David W. Plath and directed by Chet Kincaid, the MPG team that created the award-winning documentary, *Makiko’s New World*. It is scheduled for release in the summer of 2001 and will be distributed by Documentary Educational Resources, the agent for several MPG programs. ♦

A flamenco dance class from *Under Another Sun: Singapore’s Japanese*, scheduled for release this summer.



Treasure the Treasures

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including classics like *Travelers Among Streams and Mountains*, by Fan Kuan, and *Early Spring*, by Guo Xi, cannot be shown full-screen except as very small images. Once magnified, no more than one-fourth of the painting can be on screen at any one time. Chinese pronunciation is available with a mouse-click; audio and text narration accompany each piece. Also, each object has “hot spots,” which produce more detailed analyses of particular features.

In the “Timeline” module, objects from the museum’s collection parade across the screen, arranged by dynasty, from “pre-history” through the Qing. This section is probably not suited to classes beyond middle school. Any of the objects can be clicked on, linking to the detailed descriptions available through the Antiquities module.

A City of Cathay

The second volume of the series is probably the most useful for classrooms, perhaps because it focuses on only one work of art, the 11-meter-

long handscroll here titled *A City of Cathay* (one of several similar paintings often titled *Going Upstream at the Qingming Festival*). The version presented here dates from the 18th century, though there are versions that date back as far as the 12th century.

This painting has long been recognized as a valuable source for teaching and learning about Chinese life in a large city (originally perhaps Kaifeng during the Southern Song era). Street entertainment, commerce, folk customs, daily household life, and architecture are just some of the many facets of life here presented. This CD would be very useful just for enabling the cumbersome scroll to be shown in a classroom.

The scroll can be accessed using six different menus: “Close-up,” “Highlights,” “Journey,” “Study,” “Guide,” and “Fun,” with the last being two jigsaw-type puzzles taken from the painting. The close-up enables the instructor to focus in on any part of the painting in great detail, at two different degrees of magnification. This permits great flexibility in viewing the painting, although flexibility is limited because the magnification has been arranged into a series of “tiles”; if a particular detail sits on the border between tiles, you may have to

continually return to the wider view to click on the adjacent “tile.” Still, this is a minor inconvenience, and the quality of magnification is exceptional and important for so detailed a painting.

For instructors or students who wish a more directed tour of the painting, the “Guide,” “Journey,” and “Highlights” menus are appropriate. The “Guide” narrates the painting, which is divided into 20 panels. Each panel is described in great detail, with hyperlinks to items described in the narrative, for instance an opera performance, a Daoist temple, or a medicine shop. Some of the scenes also include sound clips, enabling students to hear the sounds of Chinese opera or a bustling market. The “Journey” module is similar to the “Guide,” but focuses on the artistic aspects of the painting more than the social and cultural details of its subject. The “Highlights” menu permits users to narrow down the painting’s many details, choosing just one element from among eight choices (storefronts, for instance), which will then be highlighted from throughout the painting.

The “Study” module comprises resources to help understand the painting and its context,

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The Heroin Wars Trilogy

>> Directed by Adrian Cowell. 1996. 60 minutes each. Part 1: *The Opium Convoys*, Part 2: *Smack City*, and Part 3: *The King of Opium*.

The *Heroin Wars* trilogy is certainly original and dramatic film journalism, but too factually controversial for use as an educational tool. It would appear that the director paid for his seemingly exclusive access to the Shan rebels in Burma (now called Myanmar) for thirty years by projecting a favorable interpretation, even justification, for the production and distribution of opium. This illegal product has caused untold misery and unnatural death for countless numbers of people around the world. To quote the production company, “The impoverished Shans had only one way to finance their war of liberation—opium.”

The videotape production concentrates on the Shan State, which is located in a remote part of Myanmar along the borders of China and Thailand. The Shans built up the Shan State Army with opium profits for the express purpose of independence from Myanmar. The production

The technical and artistic quality of the production is superb and will certainly be entertaining for the novice audience.

authorities and eventually extradited to Myanmar. After serving some years in prison, he was released and went to work fighting the opium trade for the Myanmar government. The second warlord cultivated and pampered the international media and became famous as “Kuhn Sa.” He eventually surrendered himself and 12,000 members of the Shan State Army to the Myanmar government and is now reportedly a thriving businessman in Myanmar. In summary, both warlords profited from their years in the opium trade in which many Shan State Army and Myanmar Army troops were killed and maimed, and the world was

highlights the leadership of first one and then another Shan warlord. Both seem to have successfully convinced the production company to justify the illegal drug trade under the guise of a war of liberation from Myanmar.

The first warlord was arrested by Thai

flooded with the deadly drug. Of course, the Shan State area remains part of Myanmar. Amazingly, the Shan State Army has become a militia force of the Myanmar government and both former warlords are living in comfort.

The narration has an “Alice in Wonderland” quality in which the warlords appear to look honorable and credible, but the Thai government authorities, the United States government authorities (mainly the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency), and the Myanmar government look either corrupt, or at least inept, in dealing with the opium trade for over thirty years. The narrator (who was also the director of the trilogy) makes brief allegations of corruption and ineptness without substantiation other than the statements of the two criminal warlords. On more than one occasion, the production company waived journalistic objectivity by becoming a player in this international life-and-death drama. For example, the narrator claims (and films) that he brought one warlord’s proposal to sell the annual opium crop for twelve million dollars to the United States Embassy in Bangkok. The narrator claims that bribes and duplicity by agencies of the Thai and United States govern-

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Nu Shu: A Hidden Language of Women in China

>> Directed by Yue-Qing Yang. 1999. 59 minutes.

In 1999, the Sunday Times of London announced that a “secret language” used only by women had been “discovered” in southern China. The story was prompted by the premiere of Yue-Qing Yang’s documentary film, *Nu Shu: A Hidden Language of Women in China*. The journalist got it wrong, however, since the subject of the film is a writing system, not a language, and its existence had been known and documented by Chinese scholars for at least half a century. After viewing the film, I am not sure we can blame the journalist for the misinterpretation.

The writing system, called Nu Shu, literally “women’s writing,” was once used in Jiang Yong county in Hunan province, where residents reflect a mixture of Yao and Han ethnic cultures. A primary theme of the film is that Nu Shu helped to strengthen female bonds and served as a coping strategy for women dealing with an imported, Han-derived patriarchal system. This is a region where women (and men) customarily created ritual siblinghoods, special relationships contracted with same-sex, same-age friends. A local saying was, “Beside a well, one won’t thirst; beside a sister, one won’t despair.” The film is a remarkable demonstration of the social role of writing in an ethnographic context, illustrating how shared and exchanged Nu Shu writings fostered and buttressed ritual sisterships. Men weren’t really “forbidden” to learn Nu Shu, as the film asserts, they just ignored or belittled it. Nu Shu writing was cherished and squirreled away as treasured memorabilia, and was burned at a woman’s death so that she could read it in the afterlife.

In the film’s National Geographic-style search for the oblique, diamond-shaped script, we learn that it was intertwined with forms of Han and Yao literary genres, including lyric ballads, folktales, and letters lamenting the wretched state of marriage. Nu Shu was also tied to a unique local custom, the “third-day booklets” given to a bride by her ritual sisters and female kin. The cathartic function of Nu Shu writing is particularly highlighted in the film. We meet eighty-six-year-old Huan-Yi Yang, one of the few women still able to read and write it, and other elderly ladies who speak of the importance of exchanging Nu Shu-encoded sentiments. Although younger women may still know the songs and poems, they no longer learn the writing system. Sociopolitical changes since 1949, such as the anti-tradition campaigns of the Cultural Revolution, different



COURTESY OF WOMEN MAKE MOVIES

work roles for women, and television, have been linked to its demise.

One of the things I loved about the film was seeing examples of spidery Nu Shu calligraphy crawl across the screen. It is said that local men called it “ant graphs” or “mosquito graphs” due to the extended legs of some of the strokes. However, the film doesn’t provide adequate information on the technical features of Nu Shu, which is predominantly syllabic (each graph represents a syllable), with the addition of logographic, iconic and punctuation graphs. The writing system contains around 700 core graphs, and individual graphs might be composed of one to twenty strokes combined with dots, curves or small chevrons. A text

was read upright or titled, right to left and top to bottom, although some samples of boustrophedon (writing in alternating directions) have also been found. Groups of women chanted aloud or sang from texts while doing embroidery or celebrating holidays and festivals.

Nu Shu is derived from Chinese characters, and the original shapes can still be detected in perhaps half of the graphs if you imagine that square, vertical characters have been gripped by the upper right and lower left edges and pulled diagonally. The whole aspect of the script, inked thinly with crosshatched lines and threadlike tendrils, resembles complex embroidery designs, a similarity

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Japanese Media Resources Under \$40

In the last issue, this column discussed quality resources focusing on China that could be found for under \$30. This time I chose to concentrate on Japan, perhaps the most popular Asian country to teach, especially at the K–12 level. Unsurprisingly, I had no shortage of material to sort through and many I wanted to recommend. The ones finally decided upon are, in my opinion, representative of the best cheaply available media resources focusing on the following three areas: traditional art-forms, the wartime period, and modern Japanese culture.

Bargain Buys!

Living Traditions: Introducing Japan's Visual, Performing, and Literary Art Forms

Japan is famous for its rich artistic heritage, a legacy that has been carefully preserved and developed for centuries. In 1980, National Geographic produced *Living Treasures of Japan*, a 60-minute documentary featuring a number of Japan's finest artisans. Recognized by the Japanese government as the best in their respective crafts, these artists are responsible for teaching the next generation their skills, which include doll-making, weaving, sword-making, *koto*, puppetry, and others. Another similar documentary suitable for high school and college students is *The Tradition of Performing Arts in Japan*, part of *Japan: The Land and Its People* series. *Performing Arts* contains extensive footage of traditional Japanese theater, focusing on Noh, Bunraku puppetry, and Kabuki. Although this documentary could feature more historical background, the performance clips are impressive and well explained.

There is also a multitude of slide and audiocassette units that focus on Japanese art. *Japan: Images and Words* is composed of a 64-page lesson book, 13 photos, and six slides. Designed for sixth-grade language arts classes, the main goal of this unit is to teach students how they can learn about a society through looking at its artwork. The first lessons compare Western and Japanese techniques and show connections between artwork and folktales. The final lessons instruct students on how to create their own screens, a task that will probably involve purchasing additional materials, such as ink, brushes, and calligraphy paper. Another unit, which requires nothing extra except some creativity, is the literary arts curriculum unit, *The Haiku Moment*, available in elementary and secondary editions. Complete with 21 slides and an audiocassette, the secondary edition teaches students how to write Japanese poetry, using the

traditional five-seven-five syllable pattern and explains how seasonal changes and Zen Buddhism have inspired haiku masters. The elementary edition, which focuses on writing simple haiku, includes 12 slides and a tape.

Japan at War: Views of WWII and the Post-War Experience

Even after over fifty years, Japan's role in the Second World War is still hotly contested. Finding well-balanced accounts of this conflict is very difficult, especially for under \$40. Unfortunately, the videos I viewed that were critical of Japan's conduct (rightly so in many cases), also tended to use rather racist language that I am uncomfortable endorsing. Therefore, all of the videos I decided to recommend tend to adopt a pacifist stance and avoid glorifying either side of the conflict.

The Japanese version of the war (or at least one moderate view) is beautifully conveyed in the animated feature, *Grave of the Fireflies*. In this story, two young children, orphaned and scorned by their kin, try to survive on their own in an increasingly desperate war-torn nation. This feature is too intense for young children, but older students (8th grade–college) will gain a greater appreciation for the toll military conflict takes on all members of society, even innocent four-year old children. Another film that discusses World War II's effect on Japanese children is the American family feature *Hiroshima Maiden*. Set in 1950s America, this hour-long video details the experience of a suburban family who decide to take in a young woman from Hiroshima so that her extensive scars can be treated by local plastic surgeons. Harassed by his Jap-hating buddies, the family's elder son must come to terms with peer pressure, racism against Japanese people, and the effect war (especially atomic war) has on civilians. The young Japanese woman is faced with constant rejection in both the United States and Japan. This film is a great vehicle for teaching fourth through tenth graders acceptance of different people as well as WWII and

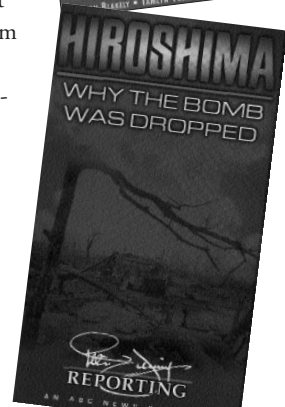
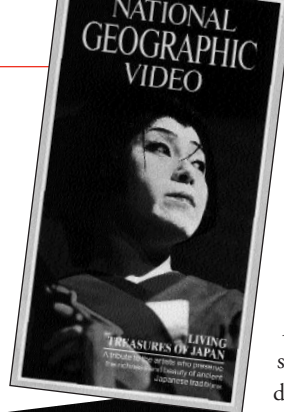
post-war history. For teachers looking for a more in-depth analysis of the atomic bombings, *Hiroshima: Why the Bomb Was Dropped*, an hour-and-a-half long special produced by ABC News, debates questions such as: Was the dropping of the bomb really necessary? How many lives did it actually save? Were there alternative courses of action? Although this documentary clearly takes the perspective that the United States was wrong to drop the bomb, high school and college educators can utilize it to initiate a two-sided discussion.

Two documentaries can be used to teach about the Occupation period following WWII, *The Pacific Century: Reinventing Japan* and *Occupied Japan: An Experiment in Democracy*. Both of these videos are appropriate for high school and college students, and feature many of the same photographs, footage, and interviews, but of the two, *Occupied* is somewhat more critical of the American occupation.

New Directions: Japan in the Modern Era

Neither the Noh scene from *The Tradition of Performing Arts in Japan*, nor the maimed face of the Hiroshima Maiden portray an accurate image of Japan today. Teachers wishing to convey to their students that Japan is a modern, evolving society should check out the following videos. For elementary school children, *Families of Japan*, part of the *Families of the World* Series, records one day in the life of two young children and their families. Similar in format to the *Families of China* video I recommended in the last issue, *Families of Japan* features two fifteen-minute segments, one about a boy who lives in a rural area and the other about a girl from the city. Older students who want to learn about their Japanese peers can watch *Suburban Tokyo*

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Asia for Kids, P.O. Box 9096, Cincinnati, OH 45209. Tel: 513-563-3100 or 800-765-5885. Fax: 513-563-3105. E-mail: info@afk.com. Web site: <http://www.afk.com>.

Asia Society, 725 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021. Tel: 800-ASK-ASIA or 212-288-6400. Fax: 888-FAX-ASIA or 212-517-8315. Web site: <http://www.asiasociety.org>.

Bullfrog Films, P.O. Box 149, Oley, PA 19547. Tel: 800-543-3764. Fax: 610-370-1978. E-mail: catalog@bullfrogfilms.com. Web site: <http://www.bullfrogfilms.com>.

Facets Video, 1517 West Fullerton Avenue, Chicago, IL 60614. Tel: 800-331-6197 or 773-281-9075. Fax: 773-929-5437. E-mail: sales@facets.org. Web site: <http://www.facets.org>.

Filmakers Library, 124 East 40th Street, New York, NY 10016. Tel: 212-808-4980. Fax: 212-808-4983. E-Mail: info@filmakers.com. Web site: <http://www.filmakers.com>.

First Run Icarus Films, 153 Waverly Place, Sixth Floor, New York, NY 10014. Tel: 800-876-1710 or 212-727-1711. Fax: 212-989-7649. E-mail: info@frif.com. Web site: <http://www.echo.nyc.com/~frif>.

Freer Gallery of Art, Jefferson Drive at 12th Street, SW, Washington, D.C. 20560. Tel: 202-357-4880. Web site: <http://www.asia.si.edu>.

Lee & Lee Communications, U.S.A., 399 W. Trimble Rd., Bldg.3, San Jose, CA 95131. Tel: 888-ART-8099 or 408-434-3380. Fax: 408-434-3381. E-mail: leelee@acer.com. Web site: <http://www.culturalcafe.com>

Library Video Company, P.O. Box 580, 7 East Wynnewood Road, Wynnewood, PA 19096. Tel: 800-843-3620 or 610-645-4000. Fax: 610-645-4040. E-mail: comments@libraryvideo.com. Web site: <http://www.libraryvideo.com>.

PBS Video, 1320 Braddock Place, Alexandria, VA 22314-1698. Tel: 800-344-3337. Fax: 703-739-5269. Web site: <http://www.pbs.org>.

Sasuga Japanese Bookstore, 7 Upland Road, Cambridge, MA 02140. Tel: 617-497-5460. Fax:

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