Internet and Case Study Resources on Asian Economic Issues

By Yana Rodgers

Professor Rodgers and her William and Mary undergraduates.

n a keynote address to Asian Studies instructors, economist Linda Lim suggested that too many Asian Studies courses are not relevant to contemporary Asian issues.\textsuperscript{1} Students often leave an Asian Studies course with a thorough understanding of traditional cultures, but little grasp on the driving force behind the tremendous changes in Asian societies in recent years. To help instructors address Lim’s critique, this article examines how Internet resources and the case study method can be used in Asian Studies courses. These practical tools serve as excellent vehicles for students to develop their understanding of the social, institutional, and political aspects of rapid Asian economic development in recent years. These methods have been applied in an undergraduate economics seminar specific to the East and Southeast Asian economies and the role of government intervention in their structural transformations.\textsuperscript{2} Although the article utilizes examples that focus on economics, the instructional resources have other fruitful applications in Asian Studies courses, at both the secondary and university levels.

\section*{ASIAN ECONOMIC RESOURCES ON THE INTERNET}

Combining Internet resources with other materials can make classroom teaching and research more interesting and effective. Internet-based instruction strengthens students’ perceptions that the course material is relevant to real-world issues, refines their analytical abilities, and develops their computer skills. The Internet, through the Gopher and World Wide Web, offers a rapidly expanding source of Asia-related data sites, some of which are reported in Table 1. These sites provide economic analyses and a battery of descriptive statistics on Asian income, trade, finance, government budgets, investment, and other useful macroeconomic indicators.\textsuperscript{3} The table classifies the Gopher and World Wide Web locations according to three categories, and includes directions for how to work through the indices. To maintain focus, I have limit-
ed Table 1 to economics resources. Additional Asia-related information may be obtained by exploring other Gophers at Asian sites, found in a search of international Gophers, or by utilizing the net search tools for Gophers and the Web.

The first category, Asian Studies Internet Sites Abroad, includes locations for extensive information specifically on Asia. For example, one can find links to Korean universities and libraries, corporate home pages, and news clippings within the Korean index of the Australian National University’s (ANU) Asian Studies virtual library server. The ANU also has virtual library servers for Demography and Population Studies, Pacific Studies, and Social Sciences, which one can access using the same Gopher and Web addresses (with the final index choice differing from “Asian Studies Facility” as indicated in Table 1). In addition, the ANU’s “What’s New in WWW Asian Studies Newsletter” provides valuable tips for locating Asian Studies information on the Web, and it offers regular updates on new servers and materials.

A search using Gophers at universities in the United States, the second category of Table 1, results in comprehensive international economic indicators that are not limited to Asia. Here one will find cross-country data and reports in the CIA World Factbook, the State Department’s Country Reports on Economic Policy and Trade Practices, and the State Department’s Background Notes. One can also find materials specific to business conditions across countries in the International Business Practices Guide, the Overseas Business Reports, and the International Market Insight Reports. These Gophers also contain annual issues of the Economic Report of the President, which offer useful information on U.S. economic relations with other countries. Finally, most of these Gophers provide access to the Army Area Handbook series, book-length studies for individual countries that currently include China, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, and South Korea. Of the four U.S. university Gophers listed, I have found the Gopher at Rice University most helpful in providing the largest range of international resources.

The last category of Table 1 contains several specialized information sources. One can access the National Trade Data Bank for a host of international data and reports, on such topics as exchange rates, international trade agreements, and overseas industries, while the USDA site includes a wide range of agricultural statistics for China. The Public Information Center at the World Bank site offers numerous abstracts of World Bank research reports across countries, plus information on how to obtain the full-length papers.

An effective way to incorporate Internet resources into the curriculum is to progressively increase the complexity of the information collection and analysis. In the first stage, students could follow detailed instructions and examine one of the Internet’s international reports, finding specific statistics in tables assigned by the instructor. For

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTERNET SITES FOR ASIAN ECONOMIC INDICATORS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. ASIAN STUDIES INTERNET SITES ABROAD</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National University of Singapore, SunSITE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II. GOPHERS AT U.S. UNIVERSITIES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Houston State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Michigan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Missouri</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>The World Bank</td>
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</tbody>
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example, the instructor can prompt a well-informed class discussion on U.S.-Japanese economic relations by having students use the Internet to locate relevant statistics before the discussion. Students can use one of the Gophers listed to access the 1994 *Economic Report of the President* and locate figures on the U.S. merchandise trade balance with Japan, the import share of domestic consumption of manufactures in the U.S. and Japan, and foreign firms’ share of domestic sales in both countries.

The next stage in combining Internet resources with more conventional teaching techniques could involve having students use the Internet to construct and analyze a small data set in order to complete a routine problem set or short paper assignment. For example, students can use the *CIA World Factbook* series to construct a simple table of descriptive statistics on income, debt, prices, population, and trade for the South, East, and Southeast Asian economies. They can then analyze interregional differences in levels and growth rates of these variables, and interpret their findings in the context of principles from other course material.

The last stage of incorporating the Internet into the Asian Studies curriculum could involve a more complex empirical assignment as a final course project. This project would entail less structure, yet clear guidance from the instructor on reliable data sources and methodologies. One possible paper topic is the relationship between trade policy and trade performance in an Asian country.

Table 2 offers more detailed information, including Gopher and World Wide Web sites, for obtaining materials relating to these potentially useful cases.7

To promote active learning and participation, group discussion rather than lecture forms the basis of many case studies, with the instructor assigning discussion questions to guide students in their reading. Another way to incorporate a case study into the curriculum is to utilize a role play simulation. For example, Rodgers (1996) describes an exercise in which students play the roles of various ministers and advise the Indonesian president on how to resolve the macroeconomic problems associated with an oil boom. While the particular topic may interest a limited number of instructors, the framework may be applied to a host of Asian Studies topics that lend themselves to debate. Table 3 offers a summary of the scenario, ground rules, and sample discussion questions.

Before the exercise begins, the instructor describes to students the following scenario. In response to an OPEC agreement to restrict oil production and double the oil price, the Indonesian president has convened a cabinet-level meeting to discuss the oil boom’s potential economic impact and possible policy responses. Each student plays the role of an Indonesian minister who must advise the president on sensible policy changes and how to allocate the additional revenues that the state-owned oil company, PERTAMINA,
will generate. During the exercise, the instructor assumes the role of president and facilitates discussion using the assigned questions. Following the exercise, students evaluate the role play and discuss the key economic principles. Data presented in the Rodgers study indicate that the exercise encouraged the majority of students to participate more than they would with the regular discussion format and to pay closer attention to all or parts of the reading assignment.

A role playing exercise can serve as a well-timed break from the usual class routine to maintain and even raise student interest in the material. Even very simple role playing and simulation ideas work to sharpen student awareness of Asian cultures and socioeconomic issues. Instructors could also supplement the pre-exercise reading assignment with one of the international briefings described in section 2 in order to provide a basis for more informed discussion.

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Alternative simulation ideas include a debate on development and the environment; an economic summit on the benefits and costs of liberalizing trade and financial restrictions; and a mock meeting among female workers and employers to discuss employment conditions at a textiles factory.

In closing, this article has discussed several pedagogical resources to facilitate classroom examination of current Asian economic issues. My fairly brief treatment of the Internet and case study resources does invite further articles. In particular, the information on the Internet is so rich that Asian Studies faculty members.

**TABLE 3**

**ROLE PLAY FRAMEWORK**

**THE SCENARIO**
Meeting between the Indonesian President and various ministers

**THE OBJECTIVE**
Decide on oil boom revenue allocation and policy changes to prevent macroeconomic problems

**PREPARATION**
Assign roles and discuss instructions
Ask students to prepare opening statements
Assign Roemer (1985) and Gillis et al. (1992)

**STUDENTS’ ROLES**
Make effective arguments that favor the respective constituents of the Finance, Industry, Agriculture, Oil, Health and Education, or Planning Ministries

**GROUND RULES**
One to two minute opening statement per student
Open discussion, facilitated by the President (instructor)

**SAMPLE QUESTIONS**
1) What macroeconomic problems could result from the oil boom, and how may exchange rate devaluation help?
2) What share of the windfall should the government save and what share should it allocate toward vital development projects?
3) Have other countries experienced similar problems with other forms of foreign exchange inflows?

**NOTES**

2. I have taught the course three times as a sophomore tutorial at Harvard University and twice as an undergraduate seminar at the College of William and Mary.


5. Because the universities’ World Wide Web sites proved less helpful in locating international economics resources, Table 1 does not list Web sites for this category.


7. My home page contains links to all Web sites listed in Tables 1 and 2. Simply go to: http://morton.wm.edu/economics/faculty.html and select Yana Rodgers from the list of faculty members.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


