

Podcasting Asia

A little over a decade ago, Apple updated their iTunes platform to allow free audio subscriptions through iTunes. Podcasts, a mash of the terms “iPod” (a device still much the rage in 2005) and “broadcast,” have since grown gradually in popularity, finally gaining momentum with mainstream audiences over the past few years with shows like *Serial* and *The Moth*.

It is a flexible and therefore diverse format. Shows can range in length from a couple of minutes to over an hour. Many still consist of informal interviews recorded and edited on personal laptops. However, a growing number are powered by production teams funded by companies or nonprofit institutions that release tracks that are indistinguishable from professional radio. The shift toward the latter style has been powered by the rising popularity of podcasts and the prospect of substantial advertising revenue.

PODCASTS AND EDUCATORS

Podcasts are valuable tools for educators, and their use cases are nearly as diverse as the format itself. For one, they present another option for mixing up assignments. Individual podcast episodes might supplement or replace a nightly reading assignment. Finding an episode that matches the time you hope your students will commit to homework is not difficult, with episodes ranging in length from only a minute to over an hour. On the creation side, podcasts also present a unique vehicle for innovative assessment. The technology for recording a sound file is nearly ubiquitous (any smartphone or computer will do), and editing can be done via free programs like Audacity (Mac/Windows: audacityteam.org) or Bumpers (iOS: bumpers.fm).

Podcasts also serve as a jumping-off point for further individual exploration. Student might be nudged toward podcasts that fit their interests, much as they might be directed to an article or book. Similarly, teachers can make use of podcasts as a form of professional development. Podcasts are convenient to plug in during a commute, while preparing dinner, or going for a run. Personally, I like that once I subscribe to a podcast, I tend to listen to episodes in succession, introducing me to topics I might not have thought to search for in the first place.

Most podcasts are accessible either by download or online streaming, the former better on the go (on a bike ride or flight, for example) and the latter better with access to wireless internet.

Apple’s iTunes remains among the most popular ways to access podcasts, though each content producer will ultimately determine how its podcast is distributed. Podcast fans, especially those with non-Apple devices, should be prepared to have more than one listening app at their disposal. A few other options include Google’s Play Music service, Stitcher, and SoundCloud. Selecting a service ultimately boils down to personal preference, though for non-Apple users in particular, SoundCloud distinguishes itself in its collection of independent and academic podcasts.

FEATURED PODCASTS

ASIA’S PAST

China History Podcast (<https://goo.gl/CiqoRm>) was launched by businessman Laszlo Montgomery in 2010, making the podcast, together with *Simica* (profiled later), the longest-running podcasts on the list. Montgomery has now surveyed large swathes of China’s past, following the lives of individuals (Pirate Queen Zheng Yi Sao gets thirty minutes, while Zhou Enlai’s life is broken down into eight episodes), dynasties (the Han, four episodes), locations (Hong Kong, ten episodes),

and a range of other topics. Recently, the series has also expanded into two sister podcasts: *Chinese Sayings* and Qing era traveler accounts detailed in *China Vintage Hour*.

History of India (goo.gl/PCvR9T) begins in 600 BCE and marches in steady thirty-minute installments toward the present. Kit Patrick provides a refreshing spin on South Asian history. Patrick, a teaching fellow at the University of Bristol, started the podcast in 2015 as an ongoing tribute to his late wife, Snehal Sidhu-Patrick.

History of Japan Podcast (historyofjapan.wordpress.com) is produced by Isaac Meyer, a doctoral candidate in Japanese history at the University of Washington. The podcast contains narrative accounts like the *China History Podcast* above, but also delves into some fascinating academic angles. Two recent episodes of note include episode 207, which explores the Nikkei communities of Brazil and Peru, and episode 182, which examines the Buddhist socialism of Seno’o Giro.



SoundCloud interface.

Southeast Asia Crossroads Podcast (soundcloud.com/seacrossroads) is hosted by historian Eric Jones from Northern Illinois University. Episodes are spaced about a month apart and focus on both historical and present-day issues, most often featuring stories from mainland—as opposed to maritime—Southeast Asia. I especially enjoyed discovering a new take on a recurring theme from my own courses: “Knowing What We Know and the Return of the Galon King” with Maitrii Aung-Thwin.

ASIA’S PRESENT

Postcards from Asia (ceas.ku.edu/postcards-asia) is an archive of sixty-second stories on topics ranging from “Chinggis Khan” to the “Secret of MSG” from the Center for East Asian Studies at the University of Kansas. These clips are short enough to provide an audio supplement to almost any reading. And, in addition to the 300 Asia-themed clips, the series has expanded to cover other parts of the world as *Postcards from Abroad*.

Asia In-Depth (asiasociety.org/podcast-asia-depth) is one of two active podcasts from the Asia Society. Eric Fish, author of *China’s Millennials: The Want Generation*, gets behind the headlines of a wide range of topics, bringing his interest in generational change to spotlight increasingly market-driven North Korean youth and the reformist inclinations of Iran’s younger leaders. Particularly noteworthy for educators is the episode “American Universities in China—Free Speech Bastions or Threat to Academic Freedom?”

Asia Geopolitics (thediplomat.com/category/asia-geopolitics) with *Diplomat* writer Ankit Panda has been running on its weekly thirty-minute format since 2014. The scope of the podcast is similar to

its parent publication, featuring electoral politics, diplomatic relations, and examination of potential trouble spots like North Korea. The recent episode “What’s Behind the 2017 Rakhine State Crisis in Myanmar?” was an especially helpful overview of the emerging humanitarian crisis facing the Rohingya.

The Harvard Fairbank Podcast (soundcloud.com/fairbank-center) features both regular interviews and audio access to public lectures sponsored by the Fairbank Center and its Harvard affiliates. Guests include professors (Eileen Chengyin Chow spoke recently on “Teaching Global Community in an Age of Anti-Immigration”), as well as journalists (David Barbaroza and Michael Forsythe were separately featured over the summer) and even former bankers (James Stent was on to talk about his new book, *China’s Banking Transformation*). Because of the podcast’s unusual amalgam of content, do note that episodes can range quite substantially in length, with some interviews under ten minutes and some lectures clocking in closer to an hour and a half.

Korea and the World (koreaandtheworld.org) is independently produced by two doctoral candidates and an alumni of Seoul National University. The program features hourlong exchanges with a range of political and economic analysts, many of whom are based in South Korea. Interviews typically focus on one aspect of their guest’s work. John Delury, for example, discusses Sino-North Korean relations on episode 59.

Little Red Podcast (goo.gl/vnQrj2) is a monthly podcast from Graeme Smith and Louisa Lim at the University of Melbourne. The podcast stands out for its combination of depth and polish, and for its emphasis on China studies in Australia (journalist Richard MacGregor and Sydney-based academics Wanying Sun and Yingjie Guo were guests on recent episodes).



Sinica podcast live show in Washington, DC. Source: SupChina.

Sinica (supchina.com/series/sinica/) has been a fixture of my own weekly media diet since it launched in 2010. Cohosts include one-time rocker Kaiser Kuo and media entrepreneur Jeremy Goldkorn. The two were longtime Beijing residents with an impressive network of “China-watching” friends in journalism, business, academia, and beyond. Both have since moved to the United States and now help anchor the new SupChina media venture. Always informative, the show has evolved to become more intentional and include a wider range of guests. One episode that stands out is “The Negotiator: Charlene Barshefsky,” which provides an insider’s perspective on China’s WTO accession talks during the Clinton administration.



Wō Men hosts Yajun Zhang and Jingjing Zhang. Source: <https://tinyurl.com/y6w5nsqf>.

Wō Men (<http://womenpodcast.net/>) is the newest podcast on this list, having launched only in July 2017. It stands apart from many other podcasts on this list because its hosts are both female and from the country they are reporting on. This perspective leads to some fascinating takes on “everyday life” in China. In one recent episode, “A Chinese Mother’s Life in Three Different Countries,” their guest emphasizes the similarities between parenthood in China and the United States, and contrasts her experiences in both places with her life in Germany. ■

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