Asian Fiction of the Twentieth Century
A Novel Approach to History

By Andrea Caron Kempf

History viewed through the lens of fiction can enhance a standard textbook, making the subject more immediate and compelling to students. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students who read a novel in conjunction with a history class become more engaged with the subject. Both the grand themes of a work of fiction and its quotidian details inform and educate. Remained with a reader long after the novel or the curse fiction and its quotidian details inform and educate. Remaining with a

Asian Fiction in the Twentieth Century: An Annotated Bibliography of Fiction

A young Japanese naval recruit, who has become desensitized to war’s brutality, later views the atomic bomb’s devastation of Hiroshima, his home. (Japan)

A young widow is forced into prostitution and her son shamed when UN troops set up base near an idyllic Korean village. The author contrasts the old values of the village headman with the realities of life during war. (Korea)

The younger son of a Tibetan warlord tells the story of the Chinese occupation of his country. Although the young man is generally considered to be an idiot by his family, his is the wisest voice as he watches the Chinese destroy his culture. (Tibet, China)


This semi-autobiographical account of a North Vietnamese soldier fighting for ten years in the Vietnamese War is an excellent view of the war from a northern soldier’s point of view. (Vietnam)

A Chinese immigrant to Thailand writes his mother a series of letters describing his life as an immigrant, as a husband and father, and as a merchant. The novel is an excellent example of how immigrants and the local population view each other. It could be written about immigrants anywhere. (Thailand, China)

Two teenage boys, the sons of disgraced intellectuals, are sent to the countryside for reeducation during the Cultural Revolution. Discovering a cache of nineteenth century French novels translated into Chinese, they are intellectually liberated by the power of imagination and love. (China)
Three generations of women in Vietnam are divided by past grievances where, despite war and political upheaval, village traditions remain paramount. This novel has been banned in Vietnam. (Vietnam)

This is an historical novel about the British in Burma, their treatment of the Burmese royal family, and the involvement of Indian military personnel in British activities. (Myanmar, India)

The devastation visited on Filipinos during World War II shows how villages became battlegrounds between Japanese and Americans. (Philippines)

This haunting narrative follows a young Korean boy through the years of World War II when the Japanese imposed their culture, religion, and will over native Koreans—a story of courage in the face of overwhelming odds. (Korea)

This novel explores the effect of the 1947 Partition of India on lives in a remote village in the Punjab where Sikhs and their Muslim neighbors lived together in harmony for generations until ethnic hatred exploded as the country broke apart. (India/Pakistan)

A Malaysian family originally from Sri Lanka endures hardships from the World War II invasion of the Japanese to the 1990’s financial bubble and its aftermath. The novel features an indomitable matriarch who through every trial holds the family together. (Malaysia)

Marahimin, Ismail. *And the War is Over* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1986)
In this novel of three clashing cultures at the end of World War II, Dutch and Indonesian prisoners in a Japanese work camp on the island of Sumatra plan an escape from their captors, unaware that the Japanese have lost the war. The novel won the Pegasus Prize for Literature in 1984. (Indonesia)

This novel, considered one of Mishima’s masterpieces, is based on an historical event in which a young Buddhist monk burned down a temple in Kyoto to prevent its falling into foreign hands during the American occupation. (Japan)

During a political emergency and the time of the government’s sterilization policy, a disparate group of individuals forge an unlikely community in the Bombay apartment of an independent widow. (India)

The fortunes of a Parsi family in Mumbai diminish as Hindu supremacy, economics, and entanglement in a secret service plot during a war with Pakistan affect their lives. (India)

Oe, Kenzaburo. *Nip the Bud, Shoot the Kids* (London: Marion Boyars, 1995)
A group of delinquent boys are sent to a remote village in the waning days of World War II. Abandoned by the villagers, they establish a reasonable society that is tragically destroyed when the brutal peasants return. (Japan)

A forensic pathologist returns to her home in Sri Lanka to search for the corpses of presumed torture victims during the civil war. (Sri Lanka)

This is the author’s fanciful retelling of the history of modern Pakistan. (Pakistan)

This more than 1,300-page-long novel relates the interconnected stories of four Indian families during the 1950s. The central theme is the attempt to find a suitable husband for a young woman with several suitors.

A sixteen-year-old Chinese girl living in occupied Manchuria plays
The eleven articles in this collection, edited by David Ludden, were originally published in the *Journal of Asian Studies* (JAS). They are among the countless articles and book reviews on features of capitalism in Asia published in the JAS over the last sixty years. The essays selected for this volume are supplemented by the editor’s introduction, which describes differing concepts of capitalism and globalization and their relationship to studies of Asia. A selected bibliography (“Additional Readings in the *Journal of Asian Studies*”) is also included, providing students and scholars a guide for further research.

These articles represent scholarship in the humanities and social sciences (geography, sociology, anthropology, political science, and history), and they illustrate intellectual changes that occurred from the 1950s through the 1990s. Demonstrating the broad geographical and intellectual scope of the JAS, these essays deal with economic themes related to selected countries in South, Southeast, East, and Northeast Asia.

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Go in the town square every day with a stranger who is actually a Japanese soldier in disguise. As world events lead them both to tragedy, the game becomes more important than life. (Japan, China, Manchuria)

Sidhwa, Bapsi. *Cracking India* (Minneapolis: Milkweed, 1991)
The partition of India is viewed through the eyes of an eight-year-old girl from a Parsi family in Lahore. Ethnic and religious hatreds are exposed. (India, Pakistan)

Four sisters of an impoverished aristocratic family struggle to survive and preserve their outdated traditions in the face of modernity. Their main goal is to marry off the demure third sister so that the wildest youngest sister can be married before a scandal occurs. (Japan)

These two historical novels chronicle the story of Indonesia’s struggle against Dutch colonialism. (Indonesia)

Yokomitsu, Richi. *Shanghai* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2001)
This novel looks at the lives of a group of Japanese expatriates living in Shanghai during the 1920s. All are trying to make a living while China, lacking a cohesive government, is a pressure cooker about to explode. (China, Japan)

This is the story of a former officer in the Japanese Army who goes into hiding after World War II when the Army of Occupation is searching for war criminals. The novel is a meditation on what is right and what is wrong during a war, and who is a war criminal. (Japan)

This novel follows the life of a ne’er-do-well rich young man who before the Communist takeover gambles away his family fortune. It demonstrates his experiences surviving the political upheavals of the twentieth century as he becomes a representative of everyman. (China)

Individual annotated items have been previously published by the author in a variety of bibliographies on the Johnson County Community College, Billington Library Resources Web page:

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