

## CURRICULUM MATERIALS REVIEWS

## China: Understanding Its Past

By Eileen H. Tamura, Linda K. Menton,  
Noren W. Lush, and Francis K. C. Tsui

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This textbook is written to be used as a supplement to a middle/high school World History course or as a semester stand-alone course on China. In this capacity it offers the non-China specialist teacher an excellent representation of important documents, events, and people to provide a good introduction to Chinese history. The textbook comes with a Teacher's Manual and a music compact disc.

This is a nontraditional textbook designed to assist the teacher in organizing, presenting, and evaluating each lesson. Each chapter consists of readings of primary documents, first-person accounts, and excerpts from literary works with only enough contemporary text to place the primary sources into the overall story of Chinese history. The primary documents and text are followed or preceded by suggested activities such as role-plays, guest speakers, simulations, debates, and research. Each chapter also includes questions about each reading; extension activities, such as writing book reviews and essays, developing class presentations, dramatizing excerpts from videos and readings, mapping, oral reporting, creating artwork, designing displays, presenting news broadcasts, making political cartoons; and suggestions for further readings.

The text is well documented with maps, timelines, photographs, political cartoons, tables and graphs, and a subject index. This text also includes an impressive glossary of terms, a guide to Romanization and pronunciation of Chinese words, which includes

a list of over one hundred words in both Pinyin (the style used in the book) and Wide-Giles, and a pronunciation guide.

The textbook is organized around three independent themes or units, each consisting of five chapters or sections. Unit One, "The Family, State, and Society in Imperial China, 600 B.C.E. to A.D. 1900," contains chapters on Daughters, Sons, Parents and Children, Foundations of Chinese thinking, and China and the Outside World. Unit Two, "Civilization in Collision: China in Transition, 1750–1920," contains chapters on "The Celestial Empire and the Outside World, 1750–1793," "China, Britain, and the Opium War, 1839–1842," "Foreign Encroachment in China, 1842–1911," "Domestic Strife, 1850–1873," and "Reform and Revolution, 1890–1920." Unit Three, "Transforming Society: Chinese Communism, from 1920," includes chapters on "Chaos, Confusion, and Civil War, 1920–1949," "Winning Hearts and Minds," "Dare to Act: Restructuring Society and the Economy, from 1949," "Marriage, Women, and the Family, China and Other Countries from 1949."

The Teacher's Manual follows the same organization as the text. For each chapter the manual includes a short summary, a list of main ideas, definitions of key concepts, student objectives, hand-outs for student activities, and possible responses to questions and activities presented in the textbook. The manual also includes an outline of critical thinking activities promoted in each chapter, and a chart for each chapter which lists materials and student activities.

A compact disc containing musical selections from various periods and locales is also available. This CD contains twenty-four selections including: minority and popular folksongs, excerpts from a *Buddhist Sutra*, Daoist ritual music, Confucian shrine music, the Chinese national anthem, some popular songs, and a few communist songs. The liner notes include a brief description of each selection and an English translation.

The authors have selected some of the most well known readings in Chinese history and have organized them in an interesting and stimulating fashion. The text is well focused on three themes,

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therefore avoiding an attempt to cover everything. This text, with additional readings, could serve as the basis for an innovative instructional program on China. Its appeal is more to the history teacher as a researcher and not to the history teacher as a lecturer. For teachers who want their students to be actively involved in researching and exploring China through primary documents and various interactive activities, this is an excellent text.

The Teachers Manual and the compact disc are valuable supplements to the text. The beginning or experienced teacher will find insightful suggestions for organizing and teaching lessons. The musical selections, which are representative of the vastness of China and its history, will provide the creative teacher with numerous opportunities for including these songs into valuable classroom experiences.

As more middle and high school teachers begin to teach about Asia, I think this text should be given consideration for inclusion into their curriculum. Unlike most secondary school texts that oversimplify content, and therefore lose its interest and impact, this text allows students to read many primary documents and get a real taste of Chinese history. ■

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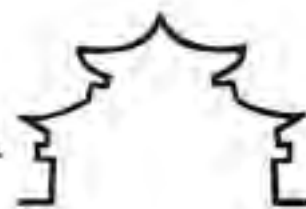
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