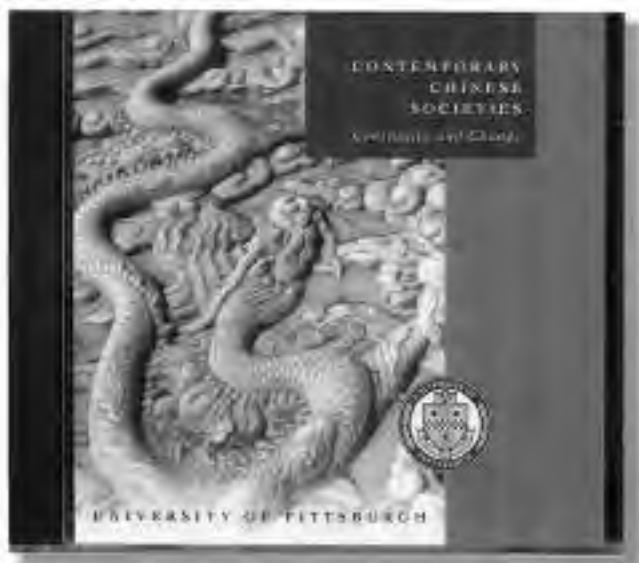


CURRICULUM MATERIALS REVIEW



Contemporary Chinese Societies

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

University of Pittsburgh Chinese Studies Faculty
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61 West 62nd Street
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http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cont_chinese/idx_chinesecd.html

The University of Pittsburgh has created a comprehensive program on contemporary China on a single CD. The disk is available from Columbia University Press at a price that is comparable to a textbook.

CONTENT

The program includes a plethora of images, most of which were shot specifically for this disk. For some of them, a zoom option is available which permits closer examination of details. There are a good number of maps that are easily accessed. Several short videos are included; these are rather small.

The text is so organized that all of the features are color coded to make them easily accessible. These include a glossary of people, places and important terms. There are also footnotes to sources. Along the margin are symbols directing the user to the appropriate photographs, audio segments and the videos.



Screen capture of the Main Menu screen.

ORGANIZATION

The package is organized in two fashions: Units and Pathways. The six Units, each divided into sections, are: Unity in Diversity; Views of Time and Space; The Individual and the Collectivity; Adapting to a Changing World; Shaping Conformity and Dissent; and Political Structure. The four Pathways are: Life and Society; Economy; Power and Politics; and the Chinese Perspective.



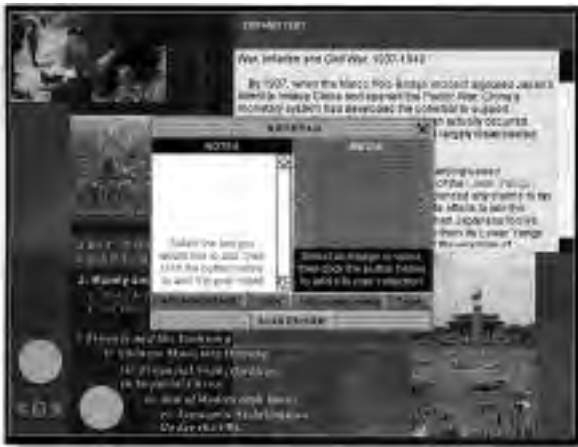
Screen capture of Pathway C: Power and Politics.

My college class had been assigned to write a short paper on China and one on Japan. When the disk became available, I gave them the choice of using the disk to do their paper on China. . . . The students were given a brief demonstration of the program; they then had access to the disk to use in the departmental computer lab. In my opinion, their papers on China, using the program, were superior to those on Japan.

NAVIGATING THE SYSTEM

An extensive overview guides the user in the organization of the package and on how to access the various parts. There are two directories as sidebars. One permits the user to access the maps. The time-line key relates events in Chinese history to happenings in other places in the world. A search mode directs one to all of the text, as well as the images, videos and the glossary. The journey log is a summary of what parts of the total package have already been viewed. There is a print option for making copies. There are links to several key Web sites.

One unique feature is the built-in Note Pad. This permits users to create their own programs by combining any of the components on the disk into individual packages.



Screen capture of the Notepad opened over an expanded text page.

The other sidebar, accessed through sections of the program, provides short quizzes so that users can monitor their understanding of the materials. It also provides a total score on all of the sections visited. There is a section on assignments that permits the user to apply the knowledge gained. Finally, there is an extensive bibliography for each of the subsections.

ANALYSIS

Because the program was so new, I was not able to plan to formally integrate it into my course in Modern East Asian History. In the short time available, I was able to examine it in some depth, and had my students make some use of it. It was looked at, briefly, by a local teacher of sixth grade World Cultures as well as by my daughter, a sixth grade student. A local teacher of tenth grade World History was also able to see it for a short time. Finally, another of my daughters, a tenth grader, viewed the disk.

Perhaps it is personal, and my age was against me, but I had to go through the program's Overview twice to feel comfortable in using it. The more I went into the program, however, the easier it became to find and use what I wanted. I should add that my daughters, part of the computer generation, had far less difficulty than I did; they found it easier to go directly into the program without using the Overview.

My college class had been assigned to write a short paper on China and one on Japan. When the disk became available, I gave them the choice of using the disk to do their paper on China. For this, I gave them an outline of the Unit subsections and allowed students to choose one as the focus of their paper. All except one student chose this option.

The students were given a brief demonstration of the program; they then had access to the disk to use in the departmental computer lab. In my opinion, their papers on China, using the program, were superior to those on Japan. They also reported that they found the experience more pleasant as well as beneficial. As a result, I would consider incorporating it into my course in the future.

Both of the public school teachers felt that they did not have sufficient time to incorporate the entire program into their classes; there were just too many other things to cover in their state-mandated curricula. Because neither of them had much background in Chinese history, they did feel it would be a useful resource for them in preparing the few classes that they could devote to China. One commented that, as a result of his exposure to the disk, his pronunciation of Chinese names had been corrected. Both felt that, if they used the disk, they would seriously revise what they taught about China. Both also were of the opinion that the many visual images were a definite asset at their particular grade level. Finally, they felt the program would be a useful resource for individual students.

My fifteen-year-old daughter, the tenth grader, found the package enjoyable, perhaps because of the time she spent in China herself. She complained that her class spent less than one week on China. She disliked the fact that her textbook had more than one chapter on a period of European History and a single chapter on all of Asia for an even longer time sequence. She particularly liked the photographs on the disk, as a number of them brought back memories.

The twelve-year-old daughter, whose memories of China were more hazy, also felt the program was useful. She expressed the wish that she could have viewed the package with her friends and

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Screen capture of the World Timeline screen.



Screen capture of the Dynasty Timeline screen.



Screen capture of the Weblink screen.

... based on the price and the content of the material, the disk can appropriately be used as the sole text for any basic college or university course in modern Chinese history or society.

classmates so that she could add some personal input to the experience. Incidentally, both have done slide shows on China with me in their classes in the past.

NITPICKING

If one delves assiduously enough into anything, it is always possible to find some fault. I felt that a few, very few, of the photographs were not particularly appropriate or useful. The short videos could have been both larger and longer. Although the title indicated that the program was about Chinese society, I found the little bits of material on Taiwan and Singapore to be slightly distracting because of the overall emphasis on the People's Republic of China.

More seriously, while the program's creators deserve accolades in providing us with such a large number of original photographs, they might have used more archival images (even in black and white) to give us a better view of a long range perspective and more visuals on China's history. It would also have been a plus if the zoom feature permitted lateral movement so that particular parts of a photograph could be examined in greater detail. It would be a wonderful addition if one could scan additional pictures and text into the Notepad.

CONCLUSION

The team from the University of Pittsburgh has provided teachers (and students) with a compact but comprehensive study of modern China. Because the price is reasonable, it is accessible to any school. Within the package are materials that are appropriate for any level from the lowest primary grades through senior high school. The versatility of the package allows the teacher to select those materials that best fit the needs of the individual classroom. Again, based on the price and the content of the material, the disk can appropriately be used as the sole text for any basic college or university course in modern Chinese history or society.

Now that the program is available on the market, its future usefulness will be enhanced if teachers using it would provide syllabi to show how they are using it at various grade levels.

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