

## Early Chinese History *The Hundred Schools Period*

By Lehn Huff and Clayton Dube

Los Angeles, CA:  
University of California,  
National Center for History in the Schools, 1995  
66 pages  
Annotated bibliography

**E**arly Chinese History is a component unit in a series of lessons designed by the National Center for History in the Schools, and is intended for use in grades nine through twelve. The unit contains background information for teachers, including a very clear summary of Romanization, a pronunciation guide, a chronology of early Chinese history, a succinct and well-written narrative of the historical background, and general introductory information on the schools of thought represented in the package. The unit revolves around a very judiciously chosen collection of primary source excerpts, including selections from the *Confucian Analects*, *Lao Zi*, *Mencius*, *Xun Zi*, *Mo Zi*, and *Zhunag Zi*, *The Book of Lord Shang*, and *Han Fei Zi*. Suggestions for collaborative learning units, topics for discussion, and other activities accompany the texts, and are intended to develop an appreciation of the nature of the historian's craft.

One of the major aims of the lesson plan is to create a sense of "being there," and to foster a greater sense of connection to past events. This is an important aim, as a common complaint among high school (and college) students is that they often perceive history as a meaningless parade of dull and lifeless facts, with little relevan-

cy to modern events. *Early Chinese History* addresses that situation through the presentation of "dramatic moments" in history, which are short, open-ended narratives presented from the point of view of those who lived through crucial turning points in history. These brief narratives set the stage for in-depth discussion of the situations, ideas, problems, and solutions which were available to the early Chinese, and which the authors see as universal. The "dramatic moment" that is the basis of this lesson plan is an extremely well-chosen one, and focuses on the social chaos surrounding the collapse of the Zhou dynasty, and the relationship between the social, political, and economic climate of China to the development of the Hundred Schools. Study of this period of Chinese history through the "dramatic moment" and accompanying texts is a particularly apt way to expose students to essential elements of Chinese culture and thought, and will lay a strong foundation for further study.

This lesson plan is commendable for its attempt to introduce the study of primary sources at the secondary level, and for providing a manageable framework in which to introduce the study of Asia, a topic often neglected in high school. The suggestions for projects included at the end of the unit are imaginative, and are the sort of group activities which encourage participation and lively discussion. There are, however, some ways in which the material could be made more accessible to both teachers and students, and some overall issues which need to be addressed. Although the unit provides some well-written, concise background materials and an annotated bibliography for teachers, one suspects that more resources are needed for teachers who have little exposure to Asian culture. Rarely are faculty currently teaching world civilization at the nation's two- and four-year colleges and universities equally at home with Asia and the West. Many world civilization faculty at the author's home

## MAKE THE JOURNEY WITH SPICE!



Travel to distant cultures... Deepen students' understanding of international topics... Explore concepts through interactive teaching strategies... For over 20 years, the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE) has served the needs of educators by providing high quality curriculum materials for grades 6-14. Our units are designed to introduce students to complex cultural and international topics. So, whether you teach social studies, history, world cultures, or contemporary world issues, SPICE has something to offer you!

To order call 1(800) 578-1114

or visit our web site: [WWW-IIS.Stanford.Edu](http://WWW-IIS.Stanford.Edu)

Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education, Institute for International Studies, Stanford University  
300 Lasuen Street, Littlefield Center, Rm. 14, Stanford, CA 94305-5013  
Email: [SPICE.SALES@forsythe.stanford.edu](mailto:SPICE.SALES@forsythe.stanford.edu)

## CURRICULUM MATERIALS REVIEWS

institution, for example, have never had a course in Asian history, literature, or culture. This is likely even more true of secondary faculty. The materials would be improved by the inclusion of audio-visual aids, such as an audio tape with pronunciation of the words found in the guide, lectures on video or audio, and short, general articles by well-known experts. All of these materials would make this unit more accessible for nonspecialists. Further, more elaborate presentation materials would make the materials more palatable for students. The "dramatic moments," for example, would also be more effective for students in this age group if presented by an actor in appropriate costume on a short video. Although the packet supplies black-and-white maps which can be converted into transparencies, they will likely be very difficult to see when displayed on an overhead. Professionally mastered color transparencies, along with other visual aids, would create a more effective learning environment.

There are other areas in which the lesson plan might be better organized and better adapted to the needs of secondary students. Students on many levels often have trouble working with primary sources. The primary sources here are to be divided among four groups of students, but are of varying lengths (ten pages for the Confucian texts, versus three, six, and five pages for the other three groups) and degrees of difficulty, and should be more equally balanced so that groups might finish in the same time frame. Further, many of these selections could be organized in a clearer way for students. The Confucian texts, for example, are presented in an entirely authentic manner, as a series of aphorisms on various topics. On the one hand, this sort of text is a particularly apt choice for secondary students, as it contains accessible short passages. On the other hand,

however, high school students will likely be bewildered and have trouble making the connections between the various threads of the text; organizing the texts according to topic would make them more accessible.

Further, several excerpts, such as the Dao De Jing (*Tao Te Ching*), present new and highly abstract ideas, which students, even on more advanced levels, often find notoriously difficult. It would be difficult to expect students to handle the group discussion projects included merely on the basis of the dramatic moment and its initial discussion. Here again, inclusion of audio-visual materials, such as a brief video-taped "dramatic moment" with a Confucian, Daoist, and representative of the other schools, would be very helpful. Non-Asian students often lament that lack of familiarity with Asian names and history makes it difficult for them to digest this material. Brief video presentations or the inclusion of slides and other resources for teachers would enable one to introduce this topic more effectively to a diverse group of students with diverse backgrounds and learning styles.

One final caveat is in order here, and that concerns the underlying philosophy of history of the lesson plan. The attempt to create a sense of "being there" is reminiscent of Robin Collingwood's philosophy of history, a philosophy which many historians find extremely problematic. Similarly, many historians have challenged the validity of the authors' assumption that one can draw parallels between events of the past and events of the present across widely divergent cultural assumptions and historical realities. Since one of the fundamental goals of the unit is to acquaint students with the methodology and philosophy of history, the omission of any discussion of these larger issues is problematic. The dichotomy between the Confucian and Legalist views of the past would have been one context in which these issues might have been raised, and would also have been an important step on the way to a complete understanding of the relation of ancient thought to various aspects of Chinese society in the past and in the present.

In general, *Early Chinese History* is to be commended for making these resources available in a single package to teachers and students at the secondary level, and is a good basic set of materials for introducing fundamental aspects of Chinese culture. The "dramatic moments" offer teachers a relatively easy and enjoyable way to approach basic features of Chinese thought on the secondary level, and the sources and activities offer a framework with which to develop critical skills. The texts and other resources included in the package can be adapted to many different settings and teaching styles, and provide a firm foundation upon which to integrate the study of Asia into the modern curriculum. ■

Deborah Vess

DEBORAH VESS is Director of Interdisciplinary Studies and Associate Professor of History at Georgia College and State University in Milledgeville, Georgia. She holds the Ph.D. in medieval history from the University of North Texas.



™ The World Leader in ComputerChinese

**Pinyin+AutoInput™ 97**

for Windows® on TwinBridge® platform

**EASY TO USE, EASY TO LEARN, EASY TO TEACH**  
(Tested & Proven in Peking University Computer Lab. \*)

No selecting, no picking !

Touch-type ComputerChinese, just like English or French.

Touch-type ComputerChinese onto the Internet to anybody,  
And any computer can receive it!

\* \* \* \* \*

"ComputerChinese = SuperPinyin + Pinxxie Input System"

"电脑中文 = 高级拼音 + 拼写输入系统"

"Diaan-mnaao Zhongwenn = Gaojii-Pinyin + Pinxxie Shuruu Xiitooong"

Chinese Computer Communications, Inc. (CCC)

820 North Capitol Avenue, Lansing, MI 48906

Phone: (517) 372-4660 Fax: (517) 372-9959

E-mail: ccc@pinxxie.com <http://www.pinxxie.com>

**AutoInput™ 97** using your TwinBridge 4.x \$149.00

**AutoInput™ 97** with new TwinBridge 4.5 \$333.00

\*For other CCC info, see *Education About Asia*, Fall 1996, p. 71.  
China Patent 88 1 02009.5 U.S. Patent 5,257,938