

Pacific Passage

The Study of American-East Asian Relations on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century

Warren I. Cohen, ed.

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407 PAGES + CHAPTER ENDNOTES + INDEX

Can debates over the “research agenda” of American and Asian historians of U.S. relations with East and Southeast Asian countries stimulate college students’ critical thinking skills? Yes! Lively reviews of trends in transregional historiography can support the learning objectives of upper-division international history, comparative foreign policy, or Vietnam War courses. Discussions and debates outlined in *Pacific Passage: The Study of American-East Asian Relations on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century* provide such an opportunity.

Pacific Passage reviews “the accomplishments” of international historians since the early 1980s and proposes a collective “research agenda” for the coming decade (xvii). Regrouping chapter themes by the following authors, I would assign them in a sequence differing from that in *Pacific Passage*: United States relations with China by Jian Chen, et al.; “U.S.-Philippines relations since 1898” by Glenn Anthony May; “Japanese scholarship on U.S. involvement in East Asia” by Tadashi Aruga; “Japan and Korea, 1900–45,” by Michael A. Barnhart; “Korea since World War II” by Bruce Cumings; “U.S.-Japan relations during 1945–70” by Marc Gallicchio; “U.S.-Vietnam relations and the Vietnam War” by Robert J. McMahon; and “Russian international historiography since the mid-1980s” by Constantine V. Pleshakov. The inclusion of chapters on U.S. relations with Vietnam and the Philippines suggests that “East Asian” in the subtitle of *Pacific Passage* would better have been expanded so as regionally to refer to those two “Southeast Asian” countries, as well.

Teachers concerned with enhancing students’ critical thinking skills may integrate chapters from *Pacific Passage* into their undergraduate courses in the following four ways: First, although the coauthors do not share a common theoretical framework, methodologically they prefer multilingual, multi-archival investigation. Their chapter endnotes yield a wealth of citations to works in English, as well as in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Russian. On the one hand, the instructor may illustrate types of historical reasoning by referring to those citations which support claims and inferences made by the fifteen coauthors. On the other hand, the instructor may use chapter endnotes to introduce students to perspectives divergent from those articulated by the authors. Some citations may also suggest additional assigned readings or works to be consulted in preparing lectures and discussion notes. Meanwhile, students should be encouraged to use the index as a gateway for broader exploration of themes cutting across individual chapters of *Pacific Passage*, and students in courses assigning the entire volume might be asked to evaluate Warren I.

Cohen’s introduction and Ernest R. May’s epilogue.

Second, the historiographic “research agenda” (xviii) is elastic, that is, susceptible to being stretched to fit competing political purposes. Indeed, this agenda often reflects domestic governmental priorities not only in the U.S., but also in China, Japan and elsewhere. Thus, even “the definition and periodization of historical fields are always problematic,” according to William C. Kirby (163), partly because the focused time frames (periods) may reflect the needs, problems, and accomplishments of a government at particular historical junctures. In a more specific criticism, Bruce Cumings wonders why presumably independent academics express “uncritical enthusiasm” over “the immense sacrifice that the Korean people made to drag their country into the late twentieth century” (360).

By highlighting appropriate references in chapters 1–3, 7, 9–11 and 13 of *Pacific Passage*, teachers can show how historical research sometimes depends on the availability of secret documents while also underscoring important inferences made from open-source materials. Some students may be inspired by the ingenuity of scholars who make new inquiries or challenge answers to once-settled questions. Surprisingly, the potentially proactive role of historians in triggering Freedom of Information Act requests is not mentioned.

Third, *Pacific Passage* introduces undergraduates to the notion that bilateral and trilateral U.S. relations are often poorly understood if one only considers the perspectives of American political, diplomatic or military leaders, that is, as if “the government” always has had a unified set of preferences or as if the government is always the only American institution affecting U.S. relations with countries in East and Southeast Asia. To cite a few examples, the reader is introduced to relevant perspectives of students (9), teachers (40–41), traders (121–24), women missionaries (130–31), newspaper reporters (24, 132, 154) and priests freelancing as pre-Pearl Harbor diplomatic interlocutors (52, 194). Chapters by Charles W. Hayford on “Chinese-American Cultural Relations, 1900–45” and Gordon Chang on “Asian Immigrants and American Foreign Relations” provide a counterpoint to state-centric analyses of foreign policy. The domestic politics of governmental foreign policy, i.e., the external affairs preferences of governmental officials, receives attention, as do other dimensions of society-to-society foreign relations. Professor Chang claims that “the Second World War appears to be a turning point in the study of America-East Asia relations.” Chang continues, “The classic studies of the war in the Pacific, its causes, and its aftermath that were completed in the immediate postwar period gave relatively little attention to the immigration question or even to its legacy in American-East Asian relations” (106).

One might also look for additional links between a country’s internal politics and its external relations with other governments. For example, students might be assigned to assess and discuss the changing impact of newspapers, film, radio, television, and most recently, the Internet, on United States relations with governments and societies in East and Southeast Asia. Ernest R. May is the only contributor to *Pacific Passage* to mention “the continuing revolution in telecommunications” (383–84) in relation to the development of U.S. foreign policy.

Fourth, essays in *Pacific Passage* suggest, in turn, how “modern-

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ization theory" (8–10, 11, 119–20, 122, 352), the "world systems framework" (123), "dependency theory" (296–98) and the "clash of civilizations" approach (115, 385) have influenced competing historical interpretations of U.S.-East Asian international relations and, in some cases, have shaped U.S. foreign policy. Although none of the authors tells us, the language of "dependency theory" (now repudiated by its pioneer, Andre Gunder Frank) served the purposes of Asian foreign policymakers like former President Ferdinand Edralin Marcos (1965–86) of the Philippines and was reflected in his speeches, especially during the early martial law period (1972–74). Elaborating the contending perspectives will help students appreciate the methodological and political stakes imbedded in each of these contending social scientific positions.

Pacific Passage: The Study of American-East Asian Relations on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century will engage and challenge history, political science, and Asian studies majors. ■

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Greater China and U.S. Foreign Policy

The Choice Between Confrontation and Mutual Respect

Thomas A. Metzger and Ramon H. Myers, eds.

STANFORD: HOOVER INSTITUTION PRESS, 1996
IX + 124 PAGES

This work is a compilation of ten papers given by distinguished scholars and diplomats at a December 1994 Hoover Institution-sponsored conference. In addition to undergraduate students, high school juniors and seniors will benefit from this text if they have a background in either political science or twentieth-century Chinese history and have completed a U.S. history course. As a text, *Greater China* cannot stand alone; rather, it is an excellent supplement to a foreign policy, political science, or U.S. history textbook. Three themes recur throughout the ten essays that students and teachers should discuss, analyze, and come to conclusions on. These main ideas are: past, present, and future U.S. positions in Asia; the realpolitik policies of China's leaders; and the urgent need for a U.S.-China strategy.

First, the authors agree that the U.S. is, and will continue to be, in a difficult position in Asia. The U.S. public is not interested in policing the world to guarantee global peace: "With a U.S. public unwilling resolutely to bear this burden, 'containment' can be no more than talking loudly while carrying a small stick" (p. viii). Students who are aware of George F. Kennan's post-World War II containment strategy should compare U.S. past foreign policy with the country's future goals. But analysis of the U.S. past containment strategies will only begin the discussion. China is very different than the USSR, and containment based on "mutual respect" will be difficult given the U.S. track record in China. On the issue of containment, students will note that among the China experts there are the proverbial "hawks" and "doves."

Students will also deepen their understanding of China's intricate political system. Note, for example, the opening essay where the editors describe assumptions the book's various authors share: "Many feel that PRC leaders are shrewd, unscrupulous practitioners of realpolitik who typically posture and bully to get what they want without accommodating the interests of other nations, and that the United States should not let itself be bullied by them. We fully agree" (p. 17). Teachers can spend class sessions dissecting such assumptions. Why are PRC leaders shrewd, unscrupulous . . . ? Does it have something to do with traditional Chinese politics that date back hundreds or thousands of years? Or is it a perspective brought to China by U.S. scholars and policymakers?

Finally, this work should spark interest in teachers and students because of its crisis-like message. One example of this urgency is