

TEACHING RESOURCES FOR MODERN CHINA

By Ian Tiedemann

With its rapid emergence on the world scene, including China into a global studies curriculum is no longer an instructor's choice but a necessity. Not examining our great commercial and diplomatic competitor/partner in the classroom would be irresponsible to our students. I have, therefore, sought to augment my course curriculum with Chinese case studies and comparisons in print, Internet, or audio/visual formats.

Making curricular additions to my school's global history offering is relatively fluid because the course centers on quarterly topics: Nation Building, Imperialism, Revolution, and Conflict and Cooperation. Within each of these quarterly meditations, there is considerable room for material beyond the mandatory case studies. In fact, the entire point of the class is that thematic generalizations will hold true regardless of chronology or geography. That said, adding Chinese-specific examples to the course is simply a matter of understanding thematically similar concepts, events, and phenomena.

The theme of Nation Building is probably the year's most complex and important discussion. It deals with diverse topics like geographic impacts on society, personal and national identity, constructing a legitimate government, and merging traditional culture with modern challenges. This theme is also extremely relevant to China's ongoing development and modernization. A study of Chinese nation building could begin with "How where you live affects how you live." For this unit, students can easily examine any map of Asia and take note of China's geographical features—rivers, boundaries, neighboring countries, and topography. For a deeper understanding of the impact of geography, students can research China's human and material resources. This study would highlight China's strengths and its economic necessities. One quick resource is the *World Factbook* database. Also see Columbia University's *Asia for Educators* Web site for maps, regional information, and further lesson ideas on geography.

A unit on government structure and state building could utilize China's evolution from communist revolution to authoritarian capitalism. The Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE) guide *China's Cultural Revolution* has a variety of visual and written primary sources regarding the monumental change from an old regime to a communist state. Yuan Gao's *Born Red* and Chan, Madsen and Unger's *Chen Village* offer compelling personal and secondary accounts of the cultural revolution, the direct precedent to some of China's more diplomatic and economic reforms. Many good videos online document the inner workings of modern China. Wide Angle's *The Peoples' Court* covers an emerging justice system attempting to cope with the challenges of a modern state. Frontline's *Tank Man* looks back at that pivotal moment in 1989 when one man forced everyone to stop and look; however, one wonders what the Tank Man would think of a modern China nearly twenty years after his protest. Finally, PBS's *China from the Inside* would fit especially well with a unit on state building, as it covers people interacting with their government, gender roles in the country, freedom, justice, and shifting nature.

Understanding personal and national identity through the concept of bringing many ethnicities together into one government is well documented in Chinese history. Using the SPICE curriculum guide *Ethnic Minority Groups in China*, you may surprise many students with the very real diversity of China. After all, having over a billion people should at least challenge stereotypes. The guide includes an introductory lesson on identity, and then subsequent lessons about the Hui, Tibetans, Mongolians, and the Miao. Each group has a distinct history, religious/cultural background, and relationship with China's central government. The guide's maps, charts, digital images, and handouts structure lessons that you can easily modify for your own uses. The China Institute has another online curriculum guide, *From Silk to Oil*, that investigates nation-building generalizations—geography, religious and cultural diversity, and modernization, to name a few. Finally, *Tibet: Cry of the Snow Lion* (2002) chronicles the strained history of Tibetan regionalism and resistance to cultural hegemony. The film is comprehensive. It provides insight into cultural differences between Tibet and China, historical perspective, and efforts of the international community to solve the long-standing problem.

Contemporary issues also demand lessons regarding modernization and its inverse relationship with tradition. Any visitor to China

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would remark on the enormous change, due in part to the 2008 Olympics, but China's industrial transformation has been long coming. Two documentaries, Yung Chang's *Up the Yangtze* (2007) and Jia Zhangke's *Still Life* (2006), capture the real costs of development. While the government views the Three Gorges Dam project as necessary to modernization, millions of people will lose their homes and livelihood as a result. Both films put a face on the real people who lose their way of life because of national changes; what traditions can survive are salvaged, while other old ways are abandoned. The theme of globalization is ever present, especially in *Up The Yangtze*, whose subjects work on a foreign cruise ship and must adjust to the needs of a global market. Ted C. Fishman's easily readable *China Inc.* is all about China's emergence in the global market as an economic powerhouse; for students wondering about China's economic potential, this book may convince them that it is us who should be learning another language and preparing for the needs of the global market.

Several multimedia resources examine the issue of modern Chinese in a changing culture. Wide Angle's *To Have and Have Not* looks at the twenty-first century's capitalist China, especially the widening gap between the urban rich and the rural poor. Wide Angle's *China Prep* and Frontline's *Young and Restless in China* look at China's youth through a global lens; both features show how the changing China affects the country's youth, their prospects, and their role in the global community.

The above-mentioned resources will help round out any lesson, unit, or curriculum on China. I have tried to include a variety of formats, many of which are available immediately online. If I had to single out the most compelling resources, however, I would urge you to

consider PBS's *China From the Inside*, any of the listed cultural revolution materials, and, of course, those narratives that help give students a human understanding of China. *Up the Yangtze* and *Born Red* both do this, following young people living during times of extreme change. Hopefully, these resources will enhance your teaching experience and your students' interest in China today and tomorrow. ■

PRINT RESOURCES

*Amster, Martin, ed. *From Silk to Oil: Cross-Cultural Connections along the Silk Roads* (China Institute, 2005).

Chan, Anita and Richard Madsen. *Chen Village* (University of California Press, 1992).

Ebrey, Patricia Buckley. *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1993).

Fishman, Ted. *China, Inc.: How the Rise of the Next Superpower Challenges America and the World* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2005).

Gao, Yuan. *Born Red: A Chronicle of the Cultural Revolution* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1987).

*Martone, Eric. "From Silk to Oil: Cross-Cultural Connections along the Silk Roads," *Education About Asia*, 11:3 (2006), 61.

Ethnic Minority Groups in China, Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE, 2003).

*Vernoff, Edward and Peter Seybolt. *Through Chinese Eyes: Tradition, Revolution, and Transformation* (New York: Center for International Training and Education-CITE, 2007).

VIDEO RESOURCES

**China from the Inside* (PBS, 2007).

**Still Life*, Dir. Jia Zhangke (New Yorker Video, 2006).

Tibet: Cry of the Snow Lion, Dir. Tom Piolet (New Yorker Video, 2004).

Up the Yangtze, Dir. Yung Chang (Zeitgeist Films, 2007).

ONLINE RESOURCES

Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Fact Book* at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html>.

* *Asia for Educators*, East Asian Curriculum Project, Columbia University at <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/>.

* *Frontline: Young and Restless in China* at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/youngchina/>.

Frontline: Tank Man at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tankman/view/>.

Wide Angle: China Prep at <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/episodes/china-prep/introduction/810/>.

Wide Angle: The People's Court at <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/episodes/the-peoples-court/introduction/162/>.

Wide Angle: To Have and Have Not at <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/episodes/to-have-and-have-not/introduction/886/>.

Editor's Note: The resources entries marked with an asterisk (*) have been reviewed in *EAA*. For information about particular issues, consult the searchable *EAA* Table of Contents online at <http://www.asian-studies.org/EAA/EAA-TOC-Main.aspx>.

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