

# The Columbia Project on Asia in the Core Curriculum

## Case Studies in the Social Sciences

### *A Guide for Teaching*

EDITED BY MYRON L. COHEN  
ARMONK, NEW YORK: M. E. SHARPE, 1992

Myron L. Cohen's volume, *Case Studies in the Social Sciences: A Guide for Teaching*, is the first of three projected volumes published in the series *The Columbia Project on Asia in the Core Curriculum*. A second volume on literature has also been published, and a third, on history, is in its final stages of preparation.

According to Roberta Martin, the Core Curriculum Project Director, the major objective of the editors and writers of these volumes was "to identify themes, texts, and comparative concepts that provide avenues for entry of Asian materials into core undergraduate courses." Two questions guided each of the individuals involved in the project: How can core courses focusing primarily on Western culture, tradition, and canon be enhanced by reference to Asian traditions? and: Which aspects of the wide and varied Asian traditions should be brought to the attention of the students?<sup>1</sup>

There are four major sections of the book in its present form. The first section focuses on anthropology. The second covers economics. The third examines political patterns and political ideology. The fourth and final section focuses on sociology and deals with the nature of the societies in Asia from a number of perspectives.

There is too little space to discuss in any depth the many rich essays that make up the book. Each author was faced with the problem of defining a topic, a field, or a set of case studies. The basic formula and the guidelines were rather rigid. However, many authors were able to transcend the guidelines' limitations and write essays that fit the existing format but still expressed

his or her unique style and personality. Thus, the all-important individual "voice" is not lost, even under the demands for brevity and the need to be informative and succinct.

The first section of the book deals with anthropology. Myron Cohen, the anthology's editor, leads the way here. Cohen covers family and religion in China, subjects he has dealt with in his path-breaking monograph on family structure in southern Taiwan, *Family United/Family Divided*,<sup>2</sup> and his numerous articles and essays.<sup>3</sup> These essays are models that others followed; They are tightly written, are bursting with solid information and useful insights, and cover vast terrain in a few pages. His distinctive tone, his love of his subject—as well as his hard edge—emerge intact in the essays on family and religion. Lawrence A. Babb, Doranne Jacobson, and Owen Lynch's three individual essays on India in this section are each solid and informative to instructors and students alike. Babb deals with religion in India and does so in a work of great clarity that does justice—given the limited space available—to this immensely complex subject. Jacobson and Lynch discuss the social structure and the nature of social relations from different perspectives. These essays provide the instructor or the student with starting points for future reading and research.

Readings on Indonesia and Japan are also included in the anthropology section. John R. Bowen examines family and kinship in Indonesia in one essay, and Islam in Indonesian society in another. Both pieces are useful, and in some ways fascinating, introductions to these subjects. In the third essay in this section, Robert W. Hefner focuses on questions of hierarchy and stratification in Java. It, too, is a clear introduction to a complex subject. The essays on Japan range a bit wider than the others. Theodore Bestor, a specialist on urban development in Japan, presents us with the type of well-crafted piece one has come to expect from this most productive scholar. The other articles in this section—one on rural society by William W. Kelly, a second on gender roles by Nancy Rosenberger, and a third on family by Steven R. Smith—all succeed in presenting complicated material in a concise and interesting fashion that brings to life Japanese society as seen by those who study it on site.

Lauren Kendall's piece on gender relations in Korea is the final essay in this section. Kendall has contributed to our understanding of popular religion and gender relations in an earlier book,<sup>4</sup> and here provides a useful introduction to the problems of gender relations in her area of study.

The second section of the volume is on economics. Thomas G. Rawski writes an essay on both China and Japan. His approach is to see the essay as a teaching guide, and thus, his carefully organized essay is filled with discussions of how an instructor in a core course might approach a given topic or problem. Rawski has taken the Martin/Cohen mandate most literally and produced a wide ranging work that will permit an instructor to see the problems and approaches to those problems in clear outline form.

Political science is the focus of Section Three. The essays here have been designed to present either broad panoramas or microcosms. Those on China and on Taiwan are among the best essays/case studies in the entire book. Andrew Nathan, who has already contributed much to our understanding of China's political history and its present-day system,<sup>5</sup> focuses on the issue of Maoist totalitarianism. He develops a comparative perspective that is very useful for the instructor who deals with political systems and ideologies. Jean C. Oi's essay on mobilization complements Nathan's broad piece by dealing with the way the regime works—showing how it involves all citizens, and, by doing so, keeps them in check. Edwin Winkler, who has contributed much to our understanding of the political evolution of Taiwan, summarizes much of his recent work in his essay and keeps it clear and to the point, something he does not always do in his more detailed, dense, and elaborate articles on this topic.

T. J. Pempel approaches the Japanese political system from three different perspectives. In the first essay, he focuses upon bureaucracy. Pempel then examines Japanese democracy, and finally looks at political parties and representation. Paul R. Brass looks at democracy and political participation, while Steven Philip Cohen examines the role of the military in the political process in India and Pakistan. Benedict R. O'G. Anderson addresses similar problems in his three essays on Indonesia. First, he explores the Indonesian form of authoritarianism, and next, he explores the nation's political culture. Finally, he looks at the role of the military. The instructor teaching a course in comparative politics thus has a series of essays to work with when examining the issues of democracy and totalitarianism, as well as those states dominated or heavily influenced by the military.

Sociology constitutes the final section of the book. China, India, Japan, and Vietnam are covered, and there is another section on comparative issues. Andrew Walder covers China, contributing three clear, well-defined and thoughtful essays. Walder first explores China within the context of comparative revolution. He then discusses Marxist social thought, focusing on Maoism. Finally, Walder looks at the sociology of work, a subject he has explored in some detail in a highly regarded monograph.<sup>6</sup> Joseph Elder wrote the essays in this section that deal with India. He first addresses education in India. Next, he looks at India within the context of industrial sociology. Finally, he focuses upon India's urban problems. The section on Japan is the longest in this part of the text, as religion, stratification, and the sociology of work are examined. Helen Hardacre writes on the new religions. Hiroshi Ishida examines stratification and mobility within Japanese society. Finally, Andrew Walder addresses the sociology of work. While each of these is a useful essay, the most interesting pieces in this section are Robert C. Liebman's two comparative pieces. Liebman is a sociologist who is not an East Asia specialist, but who has used Japan as a way of teaching about the United States in his courses. His perspectives

on education and work in the two societies are presented in his useful comparative essays. Andrew Walder uses Vietnam as a case study in comparative revolutions.

The anthology has richness and breadth. The essays are uniformly clear, to the point, and designed so as to highlight the basic points each author is trying to make. The essays are also jargon-free, making them that much more pleasant to read. The annotated bibliography at the end of each essay or case study aids instructors in preparing lessons, since the authors differentiate between books appropriate for students and teachers.

The very user-friendly text—its convenience and its sheer readability—is a factor that makes it not only the instructor's guide that the project directors envisioned, but also an excellent textbook for a course on Asia. I teach a course on modern East Asia and cover China, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea. I assign as reading material the articles in each of the four sections of the book that cover aspects of the respective nation's society, politics, economic system, and culture. One or more of the essays provide the fundamental information for students, who then discuss these issues in a typical class session. However, given their format and their basic intent, these articles go only so far, and so I also make use of a number of readers that contain essays that correspond to those in the book. What is important here is the fact that the Cohen volume is the essential starting point for my course. The book provides the students at my college, a unit of a larger public urban university, with a readable yet sophisticated set of essays that becomes the basis of class discussions and the basis for further research and writing.

If there is a problem with the Cohen volume as a textbook, it is that there is simply too much of a good thing. There are too many articles that are interesting in the context of a general exploration of Asia, but not relevant to a course on East Asia. The instructor might make those articles optional for those students interested in developing a more comparative approach to the subject he or she is covering. The solution to the problem of excessive material and of the text's relatively high cost is simple enough—create three separate books, one covering each of the geographic areas dealt with in the existing volume, while retaining the existing organizational, discipline-based format. This cut-and-paste editing would be easy to do in this age of computer ready publishing.

### Conclusion

The Cohen volume succeeds in its primary goal—that of providing non-area specialist social scientists in such fields as political science, sociology, economics, anthropology, and religious studies with both useful case studies and with larger, more synthesis-type pieces. These essays provide the nonspecialist with a wealth of information—and with a sense of basic theoretical structures in a well organized and easily readable form. Such essays can readily be used when these non-Asian special-

ists develop units or specific classes on Asia in their core or basic courses. The Cohen volume is also a book that specialists in each of the disciplines and nations covered will find valuable as they prepare lectures and as they work through various topics outside their own research areas. Finally, this book can also serve as a superb text for students in colleges and universities. Using the book as a teaching tool may indeed be secondary or accidental to its editors' basic purpose, but that accident is a happy one, as students in courses on modern Asia will discover.

Murray A. Rubinstein

#### NOTES

1. Roberta Martin, preface to *The Columbia Project on Asia in the Core Curriculum. Case Studies in the Social Sciences: A Guide for Teaching*, ed. Myron L. Cohen (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), xxi.
2. Myron L. Cohen, *Family United/Family Divided* (New York: Columbia, 1976).
3. Myron L. Cohen, "Souls and Salvation: Conflicting Themes in Chinese Popular Religion," in *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, ed. James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski (Berkeley: University of California, 1988), 180-202.
4. Laurel Kendall, *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits: Women in Korean Ritual Life* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985).
5. See the superb study by Andrew Nathan, *China's Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California, 1986).
6. Andrew G. Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry* (Berkeley: University of California, 1986).

**MURRAY A. RUBINSTEIN** is Professor of History at Baruch/CUNY. He is the author of a monograph on Taiwan and editor of *The Other Taiwan*.

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Gary DeCoker  
Book Review Editor  
Education About Asia  
Education Department  
Ohio Wesleyan University  
Delaware, OH 43015  
Phone: 614-368-3563  
Fax: 614-368-3299  
e-mail: gedecoke@cc.owu.edu

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PHONE: 313-665-2490  
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