

The *Power of Place* is a twenty-six part series of videos examining World Regional Geography from a case study perspective. Included in the set is a Student Study Guide and a Faculty Guide. It is closely tied into the popular text by H. J. de Blij, *Geography: Realms, Regions and Concepts*.

Of potential interest to Asianists, eight of the twenty-six episodes deal with that continent. As the scope of the series is to look at various geographic concepts through a case study approach, the treatment of Asia is not comprehensive or evenly balanced. For example, while China is treated in three of the programs, India is given coverage in only one. Two deal with the Pacific Rim, and two with Southeast Asia. Still, almost one-third of the series does deal with Asia in some way.

The present writer looked at all of those tapes dealing with Asia, with special attention to the ones on China. The Asian content seems adequate and up-to-date. The case studies deal heavily with economic geography and environmental issues and are weak on cultural awareness. Still, they give viewers a solid look at the many faceted problems of Asia as that continent exists in a global economy moving into the twenty-first century.

This imbalance on economics is due to the nature of the text and the film series. De Blij uses a different region of the world to focus on a different geographic subfield or concept. Thus, the video segments on China are intended to demonstrate development (culture is covered in the Middle Eastern segments). The intention is to present the concepts, and not to give a complete visual picture of any one area.

More specifically on China,

The Power of Place

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A Saigon street scene. Photo by Harm de Blij. COURTESY OF THE ANNENBERG/CPB COLLECTION

there is a tendency to overemphasize the coastal regions and to neglect the hinterland. One of the three programs on China looks at Lanzhou and Shenyang as frontier cities; the others deal with eastern and southern areas, including Taiwan. With the general emphasis on economics, the focus tends to be on urban areas. The footage is acceptable and fairly accurate, though in the case of Lanzhou, too much is made on similarities between the Han majority and the Hui (Chinese Muslims), ignoring rather fundamental and important differences.

While I was generally pleased with the treatment of China in the series, there were some minor concerns. The length of Shanghai's history as an entrepot seems to be exaggerated. Little was made of the still significant language differences

between north and south China. Occasional mispronunciation of Chinese words by the English narrator was a minor irritation; the voice-overs did a better job. Professor de Blij's brief comments following each case study were, in my opinion, vital for understanding the significance of the concepts presented. As a whole, the series is useful in placing Asia in the framework of a world regional geography course.

Professors Roland Williams and David Brooks, the two geographers at West Liberty State, have been using the series since it became available because it is so closely tied to the de Blij text. Both are enthusiastic about the series and feel that it enhances their presentation of World Regional Geography. The films will not get dated as quickly as other materials might

because of the case study approach. They agree that the materials are appropriate for first and second year college students.

Neither uses the entire series and do not feel that is necessary. Each uses about half of the segments, independently selecting those to meet particular needs. They foresee a similar level of use in the future. Each likes the supporting materials of the Faculty and Student Guides. The only drawback is that each video contains more than one segment. This does require some instructor time in keying a tape to the right place.

As many of our students are relatively unsophisticated about the world beyond the Ohio Valley, this series allows them to visualize environments that they have never seen. Not only do students gain an understanding of the key geographical concepts, they gain a feeling for other regions of the world that was lacking before the series was adopted.

Brooks and Williams both felt that the de Blij summaries at the end of each segment were an important part of reinforcing the concept under discussion. Many students, on the other hand, felt that these summaries were overkill. Brooks and Williams will continue to use the films at about the same level into the foreseeable future. ■

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