This Is China: The First 5,000 Years
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This Is China: The First 5,000 Years is a useful addition to many AP World History classrooms. The book effectively introduces five thousand years of history in only 192 pages. The abridged narrative smartly creates a detailed overview of China that teachers can use as a supplement or as a summer reading topic. The book provides material to build both a basic and thorough understanding of Chinese history, and it certainly can be used in high school world history classes of any level as well as the college classroom. In the AP classroom, This Is China: The First 5,000 Years becomes a centerpiece for historical understanding.

Teachers often find that their students lack the “big picture” for any given civilization much less being able to understand the interconnectedness of the world over time. An advantage for this book is that it covers China chronologically and details how one era began as the other ended. The editors use pictures, dynasty charts, and dates to reinforce the notion of where the reader is in time. The chapters are short, yet subdivided to help readers know the focus of the discussion. Sidebars provide additional information for a more focused look at important historical personalities as well as “topics for further study.”

In each chapter, the editors provide two very helpful resources for both educators and students in the form of web-based materials and a “thought experiment.” The “thought experiments” enrich classroom discussion and debate and give both the educator and students provocative questions to ponder individually or as a group.

This Is China: The First 5,000 Years is an easy-to-read overview that serves as a platform upon which teachers can build. While it offers the fundamentals on Chinese geography, dynasties, the republic, and contemporary history from Mao to the present, instructors may want to supplement this book with other sources on Chinese history, especially for upper level history courses. This Is China: The First 5,000 Years provides a manageable and stimulating approach to a subject that has long frustrated some students. Students may now wrestle with Chinese history, feel a sense of accomplishment, and win the struggle to understand China.

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