

Through Chinese Eyes Tradition, Revolution, and Transformation, 3rd Edition

BY EDWARD VERNOFF AND PETER J. SEYBOLT
NEW YORK: THE APEX PRESS, 2007
381 PAGES, ISBN: 978-0-938960-51-5, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by Charles Hayford

The first edition of this book, Peter Seybolt's *Through Chinese Eyes* (Praeger, 1974; 2 vols) was conceived just after Nixon went to Peking. This was the period of bipolar disorder in American popular attitudes toward China. Emotions swung from Cold War opposition to romantic obsession, from paranoia to pandas. Seybolt realized that neither extreme was fair or sufficient, and crafted a selection of readings to show both the idealism, which he saw in Mao's model, and the reality that was implemented by human beings. In accordance with the plan of Leon E. Clark, who originated the "Eyes" series, almost all of the pieces were written by Chinese authors, and the greatest number were originally published in the People's Republic. The aim was to present easily comprehensible Chinese per-

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sonal and official viewpoints, not monographic analysis of specialized topics (although Seybolt as a Harvard PhD knew this scholarly literature). The original book went through several revisions and helped many students (and I am sure a good number of adults) to get a "feel" for how people in China wrote about their history and experience.

When Seybolt followed the footsteps of Nixon (as well as those of Marco Polo and Pearl Buck), he found a China that had been denied to Americans. His resulting book, *Throwing the Emperor from His Horse: Portrait of a Village Leader in China, 1923–1995* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1996) is still an insightful and readable political biography of a local leader. Seybolt also published some of the earliest articles, debunking the heroic view of Mao's revolution before 1949.

I am happy to report that the new edition of *Through Chinese Eyes*, now with Edward Vernoff as co-editor, preserves the breadth and tone of the original, is nicely illustrated, and sells at a very reasonable price. The 2007 edition is about twice the size of the 1974 book. Most of the new material is devoted to the period of "opening and reform" since the 1980s. Most pieces from earlier editions are retained. This is welcome news to those who appreciated the first edition.

The organization is clear. There are six parts, each containing an introduction followed by documents, firsthand accounts, poems, or extracts from fiction. Part One, "Revolution: A Nation Stands Up," contains excerpts from Jack Belden's classic *China Shakes the World* that describe village revolution. Parts II and III ("The Seeds of Revo-

lution" and "The Confucian Tradition") contain selections from Confucian texts and descriptions that emphasize the restrictive and corrupt side, then very briefly describe defeats and disintegration from the Opium Wars to the May Fourth Movement. These set the stage for the heroic story of Mao's revolution in Part IV, "The Era of Mao Zedong." In this section, nearly one hundred pages of vivid and well chosen pieces form a mosaic of Mao's revolution from the 1927 report on peasant revolution in Hunan, down through the Cultural Revolution, to Mao's death in 1976. I suspect that most Chinese today would not put this great an emphasis on Mao in their self-presentation of China. Most teachers will want some further background reading as a supporting narrative, but it is hard to find a better selection of documents at this length.

"The Era of Reform" (Part V) introduces more criticism and controversy. The aim is not to present technical or multi-sided scholarship, but to represent important voices inside China, with an emphasis on official views. Although the successes of Deng Xiaoping's "opening and reform" are clearly presented, other sections include the "Tiananmen Crisis," "Crime and Corruption," "Environmental Issues," and "Human Rights." The final part, "China and the World," is the topic most difficult to present briefly. Sections from Qianlong's 1793 letter to George III and Teddy Roosevelt's views on China are followed by an insightful report on how contemporary villagers view foreigners, then bits on Nixon's 1972 visit, then documents on China's foreign policy.

In sum, secondary high school or survey-level college instructors will find the selections useful and the introductions helpful. The tone is that of critical sympathy, not advocacy, so there is plenty of room for additional readings. Teachers can ask students to contrast the picture of revolution in Parts I and IV with the problems reported in Part V—were the problems inevitable, given China's size and nature, or would they have been avoidable under different leadership? ■

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Through Japanese Eyes

4th Edition

BY RICHARD H. MINEAR
NEW YORK: THE APEX PRESS, 2008
334 PAGES, ISBN: 0-938960-53-9, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by Robert Fish

The new edition of *Through Japanese Eyes* offers source readings that present Japan through the eyes of a diverse set of Japanese people. Editor Richard Minear examines specific themes through (mostly) aptly selected short, and often contradictory, source readings, along with brief and pedagogically valuable introductions. The book successfully achieves the stated "dual goal" of "offering great readings about Japan that also stimulate thinking about the United States. (2) While the specific readings selected are always open to sub-

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jective debate, Minear chose a thought-provoking and varied selection that forces consideration of the nature and plurality of identities of Japanese people and are usable for students with a variety of reading levels.

Minear divides the readings into ten chapters. Five explore selected topics in Japanese history (primarily of the twentieth century) chronologically. Four explore Japan (primarily in the postwar and contemporary era) topically—focusing on “textbooks and the teaching of history,” “nature and pollution,” “gender,” and “aspects of life today.” One section is about Japanese-Americans. Although some groupings of readings, such as “aspects of Japan today,” are forced, most articulate well with the topics covered in American schools. With the exception of the chapter on Japanese-Americans, all address important issues in Japanese history and culture. While the inclusion of an outdated chapter about Japanese-Americans has a logic in the context of “stimulating thinking about the United States,” this reviewer would have preferred that the space devoted to American history instead address issues in Japanese society useful to English-speaking teachers, ranging from the Japanese position in international politics to a more nuanced treatment of the position of minorities in Japan.

Minear displays a rare sensitivity for the pedagogical needs of teachers through his selection of readings—original yet provocative brief essays on topics ranging from a statistical comparison of the US and Japan, to textbook interpretations of Japanese history, to his deftly written introductions to each reading. The editor’s introductions are sophisticated and, given the excellent questions raised about how to use documents and literature, useful even for teachers who have no intention of using the reading selections. For example, in introducing selections to three novels, Minear asks the reader: “If you were a psychologist or an anthropologist and had only these words as evidence, what picture could you paint of the authors, their values, and their society? And this: What other evidence would you like to have before painting your picture?” (25)

While some might quibble with his selection of three pieces that focus on consumer culture (this reviewer thinks they would work well in a high school classroom), his introduction helps students focus on a critical reading of the documents. Throughout the book, questions of evidence and context teach students how to read source documents critically, and also to ask what additional evidence is needed to form more solid conclusions about Japan, and, by extension, what kind of readings and topics did Minear choose to exclude?

The analytical and critical thinking skills taught in this reader make it a valuable resource, even for teachers not teaching about Japan. Given the emphasis on critical reading, there were some puzzling stylistic decisions that hopefully will be corrected in future printings. First, despite teaching the importance of contextualizing a source document

in order to interpret it, readers must turn to a list of sources in the back of the book to find when (and often who) created it. Second, many teachers will benefit from doing further reading related to the topics covered in this book. An annotated bibliography, bibliographic essay, or even a list of suggested further readings would be extremely useful. Third and finally, certain sections of editors’ introductions have not been updated, and documents of certain sections, particularly “nature and pollution,” have not been updated much since the 1974 edition. Given important developments since that time, this section should have been revised.

These suggestions aside, I highly recommend this anthology. Paired with a good textbook about Japan, students and teachers will finish this book not just more knowledgeable about Japan, but better equipped to learn about “foreign” cultures in the future. ■

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Through Indian Eyes 5th Edition

BY DONALD J. JOHNSON AND JEAN E. JOHNSON
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Reviewed by Marc Gilbert

The most important criteria for selecting classroom materials that support teaching a subject as diverse and complex as Indian civilization should be the degree to which they offer a coherent vision of their subject. A lack of vision may undermine student confidence, and may hinder their ability to examine complexities that lie beneath the “big picture.” These complexities yield the most accurate knowledge of a culture and offer the best opportunities to build learning skills, and clear foundational material is paramount. Ideally, solid materials provide both this necessary baseline and at least a glimpse of the more accurate and revealing depths that instructors and students can explore.

For more than twenty years, the authors of *Through Indian Eyes* have succeeded on both counts, offering a superb text for high school and introductory college courses addressing Indian family life, religion, history, and economy. The revised fifth edition adheres to its predecessors’ evocation of the grandest and most inclusive of all conceptualizations of Indian civilization—that developed by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. An able historian, as well as the first Prime Minister of independent India, Nehru adopted an accessible view of Indian society that stresses the continuity and underlying unity of cultural traditions, the grandeur of relatively tolerant indigenous empires, the challenges and contributions to an Indian identity arising from the British rule, and the central role played by democratic principles in India’s struggle for independ-