

## BOOK REVIEWS

# Understanding China in the 21st Century

Political, Economic, and Security Issues  
in the Asia/Pacific Region

U.S. and Japanese Relations with China

Case Studies of Cooperation  
and Competition



Photo Courtesy of the Asia/Pacific Project, SPICE, Stanford University

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**U**nderstanding China in the 21st Century seeks to “introduce students to policy options for U.S. and Japanese relations with China at the turn of the century” (p. 2). Produced by the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE), this unit is designed for use in social studies and international relations courses at the high school and community college levels. Perspectives from the U.S., Japan, and China are included in six lessons focused on historical, political, economic, and security issues in the Asia/Pacific region.

Along with providing a useful supplement to lectures and readings, *Understanding China* supports the goals of National Standards for World History. Unified by a clearly stated rationale and objectives, and pedagogically sound class activities, lessons include an introduction, background notes, maps, organizing questions, objectives, list of materials, and activities designed to maximize student interest

through active involvement. Varied approaches encourage interdisciplinary linkages. Cooperative learning techniques for small group activities are combined with assignments for individual students. Packaged in a three-ring binder, instructional materials can be easily reproduced.

Lesson One examines historical legacies. Japan’s military involvement in China during the 1930s is explored through primary sources representing Japan’s reasons for, China’s reactions to, and U.S. depictions of, the Nanking Massacre of 1937. Documents pertaining to revision of Japanese textbooks in the 1980s and the Tiananmen Incident of 1989 offer an opportunity to trace the influence of historical events on official policy and international relations. Follow-up activities which assess use of language, symbol, tone, and images, and which consider revision, distortion, and politicization of historical accounts, reinforce historical concepts and thinking skills.

Through role playing, students learn about the history of twentieth century China in Lesson Two. Set in contemporary China, the reader’s theater uses characters to represent perspectives of various social groups. The Chinese political scene before and after 1949, and reforms instituted under Deng Xiaoping, make up the two part script.

Lesson Three examines China’s economic transformations, introducing terminology and considerations involved in international trade. A case study of Nike in China surveys aspects of business management, and explores issues including factory safety, worker rights, and use of labor sources. The Nike case study illustrates concerns and problems involved in international trade.

The influence of human rights on trade relations between the U.S. and China is explored in Lesson Four. Discouraging oversimplification of complex issues, this lesson considers differing interpretations of human rights as well as differing values and underlying national assumptions. Provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and issues of national sovereignty are introduced.

Lesson Five focuses on relations among Asia/Pacific nations and considers issues pertaining to the South China Sea. Problem solving skills are reinforced through an activity in which students examine a nation’s historical perspectives and current interests in the South China Sea. As delegates representing a nation at a summit session, students learn about international diplomacy and explore a real issue of international concern.

The eighteen member nations of APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) are introduced in Lesson Six; geographical and critical thinking skills are reinforced. The lesson explores current international issues including tourism, transportation, communication, energy, and environmental concerns. Activities focus on assessment and analysis of varying perspectives, influences, and options on controversial world issues.

My criticisms of this curriculum unit are limited. Lesson One inaccurately notes that Peiping and Beijing mean Northern capital; in fact, the former means northern peace and reflects the movement of the Nationalist capital southward to Nanjing (pp. 11, 23). A few inconsistencies mark the readers’ theater, such as an illiterate peasant who fills out papers to enlist in the Communist party. An unsubstantiated

claim that it is rare “that such a conversation as that which follows would take place in China today” (p. 43) undermines the efforts of this unit and points out the need for specific citations for material drawn from autobiographical accounts. Visual images in Lesson Three lack sufficient contrast and definition for quality reproduction.

Of more concern is an apparent assumption of depth of knowledge of the contexts in which the documents in Lesson One were created, bound, or delivered. The historical notes for the 1930s do not address the fact that groups within the three nations held divergent opinions; nor do they discuss intended audiences or political affiliations of the writers. These primary sources are not parallel in nature. An official speech delivered by the Premier of Japan is contrasted with a “speech” from a Publishing Society in Shanghai.<sup>1</sup> Background information about the political affiliations of the Society, an important consideration in 1930s China, is missing. Using a *Life* magazine article and Blony bubble gum “war cards” to represent U.S. accounts glosses over debates on internationalism and isolationism which played a part in depictions of this event. A fuller picture of the complex historical contexts in which these documents emerged would add an important dimension to this lesson.

Other suggestions reflect my desire to capture the full teachable potential of this rich curriculum resource. Lesson One notes that various Romanization systems result in different spellings of Chinese words. A brief explanation of systems commonly used in historical texts (postal codes, Wade-Giles and pin-yin) and common transliterations of well-known personal and place names would be useful. Terms such as the Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact and Nine-Power Treaty, which may be unfamiliar to high school students, could be explained in a more extensive glossary of terms. Despite these suggestions and criticisms, this curriculum unit offers a valuable addition to, and a useful resource for, meeting the aims of the National Standards for World History. ■

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#### NOTE

1. In the byline for the Cheng Zung Publishing Society in Shanghai, Zung, which does not appear in Mandarin Chinese dictionaries, probably reflects an incorrect Romanization.

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# The Examination

BY MALCOLM BOSSE

NEW YORK: FARRAR, STRAUS, AND GIROUX, 1994  
296 PAGES

During this past fall a friend who specializes in young people’s literature steered me toward an intriguing novel of traditional China—the year 1448, to be exact! This story focuses on the functioning of the exam system in a way which is suspenseful, historically accurate to a reasonable degree, and conveyed through the eyes of teenagers. I think the book is appropriate as supplementary reading for students in grades eight, nine, and ten (depending on reading level, of course).

Bosse’s adventure tale follows two brothers: the older, born under the sign of the Tiger, was “strong, if reckless; loyal, but hot-tempered; compassionate, though with little respect for authority.” Younger brother, “born under the sign of the ox [was] patient and stubborn [and had] demonstrated a wonderful gift for language.” Younger brother embarks on an attempt to pass all examination levels, from district to county, province, and eventually the pinnacle of civil service advancement, Beijing. Older brother accompanies and protects his scholarly brother along the way. Of course, they make it, but not without some hair-raising skirmishes with flood, famine, and pirates along the Yangzi River, as well as members of the White Lotus Society.

In reality, younger brother seems almost too brilliant to be believable; and both young men seem to lead charmed lives as they journey from Sichuan to Beijing. Another distracting aspect of the book lies with Bosse’s mistaken use of “Lao” as a surname instead of using it to designate the older brother. However, the ultimate point of the novel rests with the contrast between Chinese scholars’ excessive emphasis on Confucian moralism and book learning as opposed to the stark realities of most people’s everyday survival. Surely, this is an essential issue of Chinese history and culture. The author does an excellent job of accurately describing the grueling examination process and explores many facets of Confucian and Daoist thought. *The Examination* may be just the book to draw young adolescents into a serious inquiry into the values of Chinese society. ■

Diana Marston Wood

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