

Students will not get a sophisticated understanding of Buddhism, but they will learn that the spread of Buddhism was not a matter of spiritual conquest, but involved complex cultural exchange, and had quite a variety of results. Similarly, primary sources can be used to make comparisons with other parts of the world. For example, selections from the Lotus Sutra can be used in making comparisons of Buddhist ideas of salvation with those in other world religions.

Third, the use of primary sources gives students a chance to “do history”: to engage in the creative process of analyzing the past through the sources available. At the college level, world history is most often taught as a foundational history course. Along with a knowledge base, students need to learn basic skills: learning to read and analyze primary sources is a crucial skill for any advanced history course. To force reluctant students to do this, primary source readings need to be discussed in class or sections, and used in writing assignments and exams.

There are some limitations to this approach, and indeed to world history as a field. Most of all, students will not gain an in-depth knowledge of any of the areas they study. If we parade one civilization after another before our students, and expect students to retain a sophisticated knowledge of each, we are sure to fail. Consequently, world history does not supplant the need for more specific regional and national histories. However, it can supplement and contextualize them, and encourage students to look seriously at foreign cultures.

If students are not going to get a complex understanding of the civilizations of the world, what can they learn from a world history course? They can learn how diverse parts of the world have been and continue to be interconnected by economy, culture, and politics. They can learn about processes of change and the structures that organize human life; how religion has related to social organization in different parts of the world; how states and empires come into being, compete with one another and fall apart; the various modes in which human labor is organized for production at different times and places; and how technology has spread back and forth across the globe. In short, they can come to an understanding of the historical contingency of many aspects of the contemporary world often taken for granted.

There is one other great advantage that teachers of Asian cultures can gain from teaching world history, particularly a course using primary sources. It forces us to expand our own intellectual horizons, to make the cross-cultural and cross-regional connections and comparisons that are often discouraged in the area studies training most of us received. Teaching from primary source documents, with all of their difficulties and contradictions, demands that we think hard about what we are teaching, and at least sometimes, question long held assumptions about the unique characteristics of the Asian societies we have sought to understand.

## *Uniting Storylines: Asia in Global Studies*

**Daniel Meissner**  
**Carthage College**

On the first day of each new term, I give the students in my Asian Civilization, Chinese History and Japanese History classes a multiple-choice, general knowledge quiz on the Far East. Invariably, they are able to correctly identify such momentous people, places, and events as Confucius, the Great Wall, the Opium War, and Samurai warriors. However, during subsequent class discussions, I have found that students usually have no concept of why Confucius is historically significant, where the Great Wall is located (or why it may have been built), who fought in the Opium War, or when the Samurai dominated Japan. They have memorized a few salient facts about Asia, but have not developed any sense of cultural or temporal linkage either within Chinese or Japanese history or between Asia and the West.

In contrast, most new students in my Western Civilization courses are able not only to identify historically significant people, places and events (e.g., Egyptian Pharaohs, the Crusades, Napoleon Bonaparte, and the Revolutionary War), but also to trace the origins of Western law to Hammurabi, politics to the Greeks, and religion to Middle Eastern Jews and Christians. Moreover, they are able to fairly accurately reconstruct an historical time line of Western development from the ancient Tigris-Euphrates civilizations, through the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, and into the European Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Industrial Revolution. Certainly, being members of a Western culture is a major reason for their greater knowledge of Western civilization. However, after twelve years (or more) of multicultural education, why are they still so woefully under-informed about Asia? Seeking answers to this question, I have examined the three main global studies texts (two social studies, one history) currently being used in middle schools of the Milwaukee public school system. A close look at the organization and content of these books provides insight into a common educational problem.

All three of the textbooks promise a balanced, comprehensive study of the development of world civilizations, a “panorama of human history from the earliest times to the present.” What they deliver, however, is something quite different. The caption for unit one of the first social science book states: “Long ago farming began in two great river valleys. One of the valleys was formed by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Southwest Asia. The other lay along the banks of the Nile.” The “other”? Were there but two ancient farming communities, both of which conveniently were located in the traditional “cradles of Western civilization”? Remarkable. From Sumer and Egypt, the authors trace the development of “human history” westward, characterizing it as enriched and refined first by the Greeks and later by the Romans. In their quest to fully explain these early stages of global history, the authors devote eighty pages in this textbook to highlighting and exploring

the roots of Western civilization.

What of the Far East? As I discovered, it is there in the form of "out-takes," as it were, of the Western storyline. The histories of China and Japan begin in chapter 8. The authors present examples of Chinese technological superiority (the invention of paper and the compass); introduce Confucianism and Daoism; and examine the politics and culture of China's brief but significant Qin Dynasty. From there, the authors jump over more than eight centuries of (presumably unnecessary) history and pick up the historical storyline at the highpoint of cultural refinement during the Tang and Song dynasties. Then they go on to Genghis Khan and the Mongol empire—globally insignificant subjects, it seems, which can be adequately discussed in only two paragraphs. In fact, the authors manage to cover all of Chinese civilization through the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) in only ten pages. Japan is dismissed in even less print. Four pages suffice to explain the country's social, economic and political development from prehistory to the fourteenth century.

Except for a brief mention of the Japanese involvement in World War II, the authors do not mention the Far East again until Chapter 26. Once again, it is a cursory glance, covering the last 200 years of Chinese, Japanese and Korean culture and history in about thirteen pages of text. Thirteen pages is perhaps enough for a thumbnail sketch or overview of the modern Far East, but what lasting impression can we expect students to form on the basis of this material?

Turning to the history textbook, I hoped to find that it would offer a more balanced global view. However, it decidedly does not. Once again, "World Civilization" starts with Sumer and then moves on to Egypt—two chapters, thirty-three pages. The authors need another three chapters (seventy pages) to explain the intricacies and influence of Greek and Roman cultures. For China, the geography, socio-political system, economy, philosophy, culture and first 2500 years of history are all covered within eleven well-illustrated pages. An interesting summary, but obviously superficial when compared to the twenty-five pages devoted to ancient Greek culture alone. Eight chapters later, the authors once again pick up the Asian storyline covering Chinese history from 300 AD to 1650 AD in fourteen pages, and all of Japanese history up to 1600 AD in seven. This is quite a feat, considering their attempt to address socio-political extremes ranging from the high culture of the Tang to the barbarous military campaigns of the Mongols, and from the haiku of Heian courtesans to the sword play of Tokugawa samurai. In total, the authors devote only sixty of the book's 800 pages—less than eight percent—to the history of China and Japan. And these two countries receive the most extensive non-Western coverage in this text!

Dismayed—if not shocked—by this time, I examined the last social science textbook with a measure of apprehension. A glance at the Table of Contents confirmed my fears. Chapter Three, the "Dawn of Civilization," centers on the "Fertile Crescent," the Hebrews, and Egypt—two chapters, forty-four pages. Inevitably, it seems, Greece

follows, then Rome. Unexpectedly, however, the authors next introduce early Indian and Chinese cultures, providing two chapters (forty-four pages) of engaging material on these two non-Western civilizations. In contrast to the dry, recycled information on dynastic cycles and cultural relics presented in the previous two books, this textbook explores China's development from a perspective of Chinese superiority, based on its extended history, cultural advancement, Confucian ethics, Daoist philosophy, civil service system, and technological innovations. This approach provides a unique insight into Chinese civilization and enables students to more clearly understand the underlying forces that impede and drive the Chinese people. Six chapters later (after Greece, Rome and the Byzantine Empire), the authors return to the Far East with another excellent analysis of cultural growth and transformation in China during the middle ages, and an equally compelling chapter on traditional Japanese culture. A final brief chapter on the last 200 years of Asian history completes the book's introduction to the Far East. In total, seventy of the textbook's 600 pages (nearly 12%) are devoted to the historical and cultural development of China and Japan.

This kind of informative, illuminating social science textbook should provide local middle school students with at least a basic knowledge of Chinese and Japanese civilizations. To a certain degree, the same can be said of the other textbooks that I have reviewed. Obviously, however, students retain little of the material presented. Why? The answer, I believe, is the inherently flawed approach taken in these books toward global studies.

Essentially, all three of these textbooks present global studies as an extension of Western civilization. The progressive storyline of Western development—Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, Europe, America—forms the structural framework to which are added specific area studies which theoretically "globalize" the subject. Thus, after examining early farming communities in Mesopotamia, Egyptian burial practices, and Greek politics, these texts insert a chapter on Chinese culture—defined in terms of Shang bronzes, Confucianism, and the Great Wall—and then immediately return to pick up the thread of Western development in Roman conquests and European settlement. According to this format, the West continues to progress through the Dark Ages, Renaissance, Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution, while China and Japan produce a few exotic artifacts, and manage to perpetuate their antiquated society. With the arrival around 1600 of Western traders and missionaries in the South China Sea, however, Asian history itself is co-opted by the Western civilization storyline, and becomes yet another chapter in the book of European and American development.

The Far East, then, exists in these textbooks only in tangential relationship to the West. China and Japan are denied a storyline of their own, and they are generally excluded from the dominant Western narrative. They are blatantly absent from chapters analyzing the global consequences of imperialism, colonialism, nationalism and the cold war—issues which significantly affected the historical development of these Asian countries. Moreover, their

traditional and modern roles in global trade, revolution and war are commonly ignored. It is no wonder, then, that students find it so difficult to retain more than a few unrelated pieces of information on Asia presented in these "global" textbooks.

The solution is easy to envision, but difficult to achieve. New, truly "universal," global textbooks and instruction must unite disparate storylines—East and West, first- and third-world. Rather than focusing on one dominant narrative, global studies must draw out culturally unique storylines, and use thematic topics, such as trade, colonialism and nationalism, to link them together into a more comprehensive and more easily retained unit. This is a difficult task, but the other members of this panel have developed some specific suggestions on how to achieve this goal.

### *A Global Perspective of the World's History*

**Heidi Roupp, President  
World History Association**

World history is a subject in its infancy. Yet 75% of the states have adopted world history standards and a new advanced placement (AP) course in World History will be offered in two years at the precollegiate level. More World History teachers will need to be trained. Colleges and universities indicate that World History course offerings have steadily increased. You may have noticed in the January *Perspectives* (newsletter of the American Historical Association) that the number of junior faculty job offerings in world history increased 94% from 17 in 1991-92 to 33 in 1997-1998. That percentage supports the figures the World History Association (WHA) reported last year. (304 departments responded to a world history questionnaire sent to 610 history departments listed in the American History Association Directory.) Two-thirds of the history departments responding to a WHA survey indicated that they now offer World History courses. Memberships of teachers and scholars in the WHA have increased 15% over the last year. Interest in world history is expanding world wide. The World History Association's most recent regional affiliate, organized in 1998 by Greg Melleuish at the University of Wollongong, is the WHA of Australasia.

Interest in world history continues to expand, motivated by an interest in globalization and a need to understand multiple perspectives of human history. As William McNeill recently observed, "background knowledge makes one less liable to unpleasant surprises—less likely to make serious mistakes by one's own action--and by extension, the actions of the U.S. government. I often reflected on how generally successful U.S. policy was in Europe after World War II (in part because of Western Civilization courses our leading officials had taken in their youth) as against the series of nasty surprises that the U.S. met in Asia from Korea and China to Vietnam. Why so?

Partly because our leaders knew so very little about those peoples and their past. Armed with a decent understanding of the past of each people, we are less likely to be seriously wrong in the judgements about their reaction to us and vice versa."

People teaching world history are self taught. Many are uncertain what world history is. There is no world history canon, but each year we learn more and do a better job of conceptualizing and teaching the subject. From a global perspective, world history is not Western civilization plus a chapter on China and India and another on Africa. Nor is world history a stylish parade of civilizations across the stage of time. World history transcends boundaries. Just as the study of U.S. History is not the study of the history of fifty states but a study of the national experience, world history is developing as a macro history from a global perspective. It is a study of ecosystems rather than trees or forests. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. World history deals with large-scale themes like migrations, demography, industrialization, cross-cultural exchange, themes that impact more than one nation or region. World history is cross-disciplinary; the scholarship engages the work of linguists, economic historians, as well as anthropologists and biologists.

In such a new field adequate conceptualization of the course is critical. New conceptualizations offer the promise of exciting new World History courses like Big History, which incorporates the history of the planet and human history. Students become acquainted with histories of scale with a local to global approach to the course. For example students can study a local mine, the California gold rush and how that fits into the larger story of gold rushes and migrations in the Pacific Basin. Scholars and educators in the WHA have formed a working partnership to develop various methodologies for studying the field, on one hand, and alternating among these approaches and their results in world history classrooms, on the other.

Teaching a global perspective requires frequent student reminders of what is happening around the world through time. Approaches to world history are often overlapping and interactive rather than discrete, compartmentalized topics. By engaging students in a study of multiple perspectives, comparisons, examples of cross cultural exchange, diffusion, or syncretism, they can begin to develop their own global perspectives. Basic world history learning improves when students are able to link the past with the present. If you find yourself teaching world history for the first time or if you are refining your world history course:

(1) Compare recent world history texts such as *The Earth and Its Peoples* by Richard Bulliet et al. and Jerry Bentley's new text which will be available this June. Become acquainted with the recent scholarship. Abstracts of the approximately 100 *Journal of World History* articles are available at <http://www2.hawaii.edu/uhp/press/journals/jwh>.

(2) Consider world history as a step-by-step process. Rome wasn't built in a day. Organize your work this year to benefit next year's students. Each year select a new topic to