

Developing Curriculum Materials on East Asia for Secondary School Students

by Linda K. Menton

Introduction

The Curriculum Research & Development Group (CRDG) is a research unit of the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i. Part of our mission is to develop curriculum materials for students in grades K–12. We pilot-test our curriculum materials in our attached laboratory school, which has about four hundred students who are selected by lottery to create a student body that reflects the ethnic distribution of Hawai'i and includes a broad range of student academic achievement and family socio-economic levels.

The social studies section of CRDG has been developing curriculum materials on Asia since the early 1990s. As a result of our geographic position in the middle of the Pacific, and because we are the only state where the majority of its residents trace their ancestry to Asia rather than to Europe, we are well aware of Asia's role in the world as a partner, a competitor, and a market. We want our students, and by extension, students in public and private schools throughout the United States, to understand the history, cultures, and geography of Asia. Certainly it is in their best economic interests to do so. China, with its population of 1.3 billion people, 20 percent of the world's population, is rapidly becoming an economic powerhouse. Japan, which is America's most important security ally in Asia, has the third largest economy in the world after the United States and China. And South Korea, another American security ally, is estimated to have become the world's tenth largest economy in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2004. Furthermore, the countries of East Asia, meaning China, Japan, and South Korea, are beginning to understand the value of regionalization for themselves and are working in partnership with each other to reach a common goal: promoting exports to American and European markets. The first East Asia Summit was held under the auspices of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2005.

Teaching and Learning About Asia

There is general agreement in the United States, at least in theory, that students should learn about Asia. However, the actual state of teaching about Asia in American schools, according to a 2001 report by the Asia Society, is neither comprehensive nor systematic, with social studies teachers in one survey devoting less than 5 percent of class time to Asia-related content.¹

There are several interrelated reasons for this omission:

- 1) a perception among teachers that they are being asked to stuff more and more into an already overcrowded world history curriculum;
- 2) uncertainty in the American public school systems as to what secondary school students will be required to know

on still-pending standardized social studies tests under the No Child Left Behind legislation. While teachers are very sure that students will be tested on their knowledge of American history, it is not clear what other social studies content students will be tested on;

3) inadequate preparation to teach about Asia. Ninety-five percent of teachers surveyed in a 1999 study self-reported that they do not have adequate preparation to teach about Asia;²

4) lack of curriculum materials about Asia. World history textbooks, despite their compendious size, frequently give short shrift to Asia. Although Asian civilizations receive more coverage in such texts than they did in the past, many can still be justifiably labeled "Eurocentric" in content. Yet despite these deficiencies, teachers report that textbooks are still the most common resource that they use to teach about Asia.³ It is true that there is a myriad of curriculum packages about Asia available on the Web. However, the quality of these materials is uneven and teachers may not be qualified to evaluate them for historical accuracy.

The social studies section of CRDG has worked to address these curricular concerns by providing teachers and students with historically accurate and pedagogically sound instructional materials about Asia. We published a curriculum package entitled *China: Understanding Its Past*, which includes a student book, a teacher's manual, and a compact disc with Chinese music from different regions, genres, and time periods in 1998. We developed a similar curriculum package, *The Rise of Modern Japan*, in 2004.⁴

Modern East Asia

We originally planned to develop a set of four interrelated but stand-alone books on China, Japan, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific, as part of a project entitled Curriculum on Asian and Pacific History. All of these instructional materials were designed to be used as flexibly as possible: to supplement the truncated information in world history texts; to be used as a primary text in an area studies course; and to use in related student activities such as Model United Nations or World Quest. As a result of our work on the China and Japan books, we decided to follow up by developing a text on East Asia, rather than Southeast Asia. We knew that our China and Japan books did not address East Asia as a region, and we were also concerned about the omission of Korea in this context.

We surveyed the existing instructional materials on East Asia to decide whether such a project was feasible. Although we found a few books that focus on the countries of East Asia using a

traditional country-by-country approach, we were not able to find a single textbook for secondary students that focused on East Asia as a region or that used a thematic approach. We applied for and received a grant from the International Research & Studies Program, which is part of the United States Department of Education, to undertake this project.

This paper focuses on one aspect of that project: the process of developing the organizational framework for a thematically based text focused on China, including Hong Kong and Taiwan; Japan; and South and North Korea.

Organizational Structure: The Larger Context

We learned long ago at CRDG that no one person has all the skills needed to develop curriculum materials on Asia. Our initial efforts to recruit such a person resulted in applicants who were either academic area specialists, who had no idea how to develop instructional materials for high school students, or excellent secondary teachers who lacked the in-depth content knowledge required for such work. We solved this problem by pooling our strengths and skills and working in teams. Our teams include area specialists, usually advanced doctoral students, who have both history and language skills, and CRDG curriculum developers, who have the necessary pedagogical skills and secondary school teaching experience for such an undertaking. Such a team allows us to work together to develop historically accurate and pedagogically sound instructional materials.

The University of Hawai'i is home to three academic centers focused on East Asia: the Center for Chinese Studies, the Center for Japanese Studies, and the Center for Korean Studies. The university is also a National Resource Center for East Asia. As a result, we have access to an excellent library collection and to many academic East Asia specialists. These academics, as well as scholars from other institutions, serve as advisors and scholarly readers for the project. They read the manuscript in draft form, and we make revisions based on their feedback. We also base revisions on feedback from teachers and high school students who pilot-test the materials in our laboratory school.

The first step in developing instructional materials, regardless of their subject or format, is to develop a solid organizational framework. We knew we did not want our text on East Asia to focus on China, Japan, and Korea separately, with one-third of the book devoted to each country. We also knew we wanted to avoid the pitfalls of traditional world history texts that emphasize coverage rather than depth and focus exclusively on chronology rather than themes and trends.

However, once we actually began to develop such a thematic framework, we realized that it was much more difficult to do than we had anticipated. I think it is fair to say that creating an organizational structure for *Modern East Asia*, the working title for this text, has proved the most difficult of any of the books we have written so far.

We decided that the guiding question for this text would be, What does a tenth- or eleventh-grade student need to know about modern East Asia?

The question is deceptively simple, but it conceals deeper questions that include some contentious issues, such as

What should be included in a historical narrative?

What can be left out?

Who decides what is included and what is left out?

Who is “qualified” to write such a narrative? Who is not and why not?

Notably none of these questions is directed to the pedagogical or developmental needs of secondary students; rather they are political questions, in the broadest sense of that word. Nevertheless, these political questions are especially germane when it comes to writing history for pre-college students.

There was a firestorm of controversy in the United States when the national standards for history, particularly for American history for grades 5–12, were published in the early 1990s. The standards became the subject of rancorous congressional hearings that pitted various interest groups against each other. Conservatives complained that the standards emphasized the worst aspects of American history, such as slavery, promoted other cultures too much, highlighted women and minorities at the expense of traditional American heroes, and marginalized Western civilization. Lynne Cheney, the former chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, described the standards as “grim and gloomy.” In the end, after the U.S. Senate voted 99 to 1 to reject the standards, a revised set of standards was published that did not include the historical examples that some found so objectionable in the original version.⁵

The American debate about history standards is a good indicator of how important national narratives are; how important they are perceived to be in creating a common national past and a common national identity; and how important they are in passing on the “truth” of a nation’s past, whatever that “truth” is considered to be, to the next generation.

These issues are not unique to the United States. Certainly we hear some of the same questions and concerns expressed in the on-going controversy about history textbooks in Japan, and the objections expressed about them by China and Korea. This longtime controversy speaks to the questions posed earlier regarding national narratives and their purpose, and who can write them and who cannot. Disagreements over textbooks, and over the way the past is portrayed in them, are often stand-ins for larger battles about past historical wrongs—especially the refusal to acknowledge them—and current political, economic, and territorial disputes.

Small wonder then that we, a team of American educators, “outsiders” as sociologists use the term, approached the task of developing a history text about East Asia with trepidation. How could we write a text that would be judged meritorious by historians, acceptable by the general public, and engaging to high school students?

Organizational Structure: The Reality

We decided that we wanted to develop a textbook about the same size as its predecessors on China and Japan, about 250 pages for the student book. We also decided that the entire instructional package would consist of a student book, a teacher’s manual, and a student activity book that would also be produced on a compact disc.

We wanted the student book to include timelines, maps, pronunciation guides, historical photos, primary documents, literary excerpts, poems and songs, charts and graphs, and many, many student activities. Fortunately, technology has made it possible to “save” some space in the student book by putting some of these items on the compact disc. It was tempting to use the disc as a default, and add many more things to it than would fit in the book. However, we endeavored to avoid the temptation, as we would simply end up with an over-long book on a disc.

Plan A

Our first efforts at imposing some structure on the history of modern East Asia was to decide what “modern” means. This is a very difficult concept for high school students, who tend to believe

that “modern” means today, right now, this very minute. It does not mean yesterday, it does not mean last year, and it certainly does not mean centuries ago. But historians see the concept much differently. We decided that since we could not write “everything” about China, Japan, and Korea, we would begin with a prologue that would *briefly* describe the last traditional dynasties of each country and then proceed with the first chapter circa 1860. So the first framework looked something like Plan A.

Plan B

Plan A, we soon learned, had the potential to turn into a thousand-page opus. So we decided instead to sketch out a thematic/chronological approach, which became Plan B. We had developed a thematically based text once before. This earlier text, entitled *A History of Hawai’i*, allowed teachers and students to study the political, economic, social, and land history of Hawai’i during a particular time span—the territorial years, for example. Alternatively, they could study one aspect of that history, such as political history, over a long time period.⁶ The schema for *A History of Hawai’i* is shown below.

Plan A

Prologue/Introduction (15 pages)	
	Qing China: 1644–1864* Tokugawa Japan: 1600–1868 Chosun Korea: 1392–1860
Chapter I (60 pages)	1860s to 1912
Chapter II (75 pages)	1912–1945
Chapter III (100 pages)	1945 to today
*The Qing dynasty ended in 1911, but 1864 was chosen to coincide with the defeat of the Taiping by Chinese government forces. Some historians date the beginnings of Chinese nationalism to 1850 and the beginning of the Taiping Rebellion.	

Schema for *A History of Hawai’i*

UNIT ONE Precontact to 1900	UNIT TWO 1900 to 1945	UNIT THREE 1945 to the Present
Chapter 1 Political	Chapter 5 Political	Chapter 9 Political
Chapter 2 Economic	Chapter 6 Economic	Chapter 10 Economic
Chapter 3 Social	Chapter 7 Social	Chapter 11 Social
Chapter 4 Land	Chapter 8 Land	Chapter 12 Land

Our first effort to construct a similar structure for Modern East Asia looked like this—

Plan B

Prologue	Chapter I	Chapter II	Chapter III
	1860s–1912	1912–1945	1945 to present
	Political	Political	Political
	Economic	Economic	Economic
	Social	Social	Social
	Foreign relations	Foreign relations	Foreign relations

It soon became apparent, however, that the histories of three very different nations could not be divided up this way. Forcing history into categories to make it “fit” destroyed the historical integrity of what we were trying to do. Nevertheless, the exercise made us more cognizant of the common threads we wanted to weave through the narrative. For example, we wanted to include the exchange of beliefs, such as Confucianism and Buddhism, and practices, such as the development of writing systems, that had taken place among these countries and cultures. It also forced us to differentiate among experiences, such as imperialism and colonialism, which were common to all three countries but were played out differently in each.

Plan C

We began to think that we might be reinventing the wheel. Maybe somebody else has done this already. So, we took a look at the national standards for world history to see if that organizational structure might work for us. After all, we had to be sure we were addressing the standards, and we could always adjust the time periods if we needed to. This resulted in Plan C, based on the national world history standards.

Plan C’s organizational structure obviously had problems. These included its omission of Korea, its dated “impact of the West” approach, and its failure to make any kind of regional con-

Plan C

The Emergence of the First Global Age, 1450–1770

Standard 5: Transformations in Asian Societies in the era of European Expansion

The student understands the transformations in India, China, and Japan in an era of expanding European commercial power.

Therefore, the student is able to:

1. Explain how the Manchus overthrew the Ming dynasty, established the multiethnic Qing, and doubled the size of the Chinese empire.
2. Evaluate China’s cultural and economic achievements during the reigns of the Kangxi and Qianlong emperors.
3. Assess the extent of European commercial penetration of China and the ability of the Chinese government to control trade.
4. Explain the character of centralized feudalism in Japan under the Tokugawa shogunate and the reasons for Japan’s political stability, economic growth and cultural dynamism.
5. Analyze Japan’s relations with Europeans between the 16th and 18th centuries and the consequences of its policy of limiting contact with foreigners.

Plan C**An Age of Revolutions, 1750–1914****Standard 3: The transformation of Eurasian societies in an era of global trade and rising European power, 1750–1870.**

Standard 3 D: The student understands how China’s Qing dynasty responded to economic and military crisis in the late 18th and 19th centuries.

Therefore, the student is able to:

1. Analyze the economic and social consequences of rapid population growth in China.
2. Analyze causes of governmental breakdown and social disintegration in China in the late 18th century.
3. Analyze why China resisted political contact with Europeans and how the opium trade contributed to European penetration of Chinese markets.
4. Analyze the causes and consequences of the Taiping Rebellion.
5. Explain the growth of the Chinese diaspora and assess the role of overseas Chinese in attempts to reform the Qing.
6. Analyze how Chinese began to reform in government after 1895 and why revolution broke out in 1911.

Standard 3 E The student understands how Japan was transformed from feudal to shogunate to modern nation state in the 19th century.

Therefore, the students is able to:

1. Analyze the internal and external causes of the Meiji Restoration.
2. Analyze the goals and policies of the Meiji state and their impact on Japan’s modernization.
3. Assess the impact of Western ideas and the roles of Confucianism and Shinto values on Japan during the Meiji period.
4. Explain the transformation of Japan from a hereditary social system to a middle class society.
5. Explain changes in Japan’s relations with China and the Western powers from the 1850s to the 1890s.
6. Analyze Japan’s rapid industrialization, technological advancement, and national integration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁷

nections, with the possible exception of standard 3E/5, regarding changes in Japan’s relations with China from the 1850s to the 1890s. Furthermore, if we tried to include all the standards, we could easily end up with another thousand-page book. After all, the standards cited here end with 1914, which coincided with our planned prologue and chapter I dates. In any event, this content-based approach reassured us that we were on the right track—many of the people, themes, and events mentioned were consistent with our earlier selections.

Plan D

We were starting to get worried. Time was moving on. We had lots of ideas and lots of timelines, and lots of pieces of paper but we needed to start pilot-testing our materials with students. What would happen if we just started writing, without a plan or an outline, doing exactly what we tell students not do? We decided it was worth a try, and so we started writing what we called “units,” pieces of text that were not very well written, that did not flow very well or move smoothly from one paragraph to the next, but that forced us to go back to the question, What does a tenth or eleventh grade student need to know about modern East Asia?

When we exchanged our units of text, which focused only on the prologue and the first chapter, we began to discern a structure that we thought would work. Its organizing principle is chronological—

However, we began to see that this schema also raised new concerns and questions.

- 1) What had we missed?
- 2) How could we address one of the major criticisms about American textbooks about Asia—that they almost always focus on America’s war experiences there? We were adamant in wanting to avoid this pitfall and, at the same time, represent war as a significant force in these countries’ histories.
- 3) How could we explicitly identify the critical connecting points for students?

Regarding this last point, we realized that we could not expect high school students to synthesize complex historical material without guidance. Our solution was to include key questions throughout the text to help students make connections. We also

planned to include fill-in-the-blanks retrieval charts and have students use them to answer questions or complete an activity. For example: What ideology formed the basis for Chinese, Korean, and Japanese society and how was it reflected in the organization of the main social classes in China, Korea, and Japan? Or, China, Japan, and Korea all signed unequal treaties with foreign powers in the

mid-nineteenth century. How were these treaties and the impact they had on each country similar or different? Or, using this series of color-coded maps, describe the changes in government and the establishment of new nations that took place in East Asia between 1945 and 1950. Then describe the political status of each of those nations today.

Plan D

Prologue: Last Traditional Dynasties	China	Japan	Korea
Chapter I 1860s to 1912 Key concepts: Sino-centricism; cultural exchange; domestic turmoil/dynastic decline; foreign imperialism; response to imperialism; self-strengthening; modernization; nationalism Point of confluence:	Japan	China	Korea
Chapter II 1912–1945 Key Concepts: Colonialism; industrialization; nationalism; republicanisim; liberalism; parliamentary democracy; revolution; ultra nationalism; militarism; capitalism, Communism; fascism; world war. Point of confluence:	Japan	China	Korea
Chapter III 1945 to today Key Concepts Cold War; Communism; democratization; technology; post-industrialization; market economy; globalization and global economy; human rights; cultural identity and integrity Point of confluence:	Japan	China	Korea

Plan E

1945

China (PRC)	Japan	S. Korea (ROK)	N. Korea (DPRK)	Taiwan (ROC)	Hong Kong (SAU)	Convergence Activity
1. Civil War Communist Revolution (Korean)	2. Occupation (posters)	1. Korean War	1. Korean War	1. Flight to	Return to Britain	1. Map-post WWII 2. Korean War 3. Cold War
2. Mao/GLF	2. Economic Recovery a. Growth b. Gov./zaibatsu c. Korean War	2. Economic Development	Political Status	Economic change/ growth	Economic growth (con't.)	
3. Cultural Revolution 1966-1977		3. Democratizaon	Economic Collapse	Government Change: authoritarianism to "democracy" 1949–1479	Return to China 1997 +50	
4. Economic Reform			4. Isolationism		4. Economic Change 1. Japan 2. Korea 3. China From textiles to heavy industry (J/K), to technology transfer	Economic Change: Japan Korea China From textiles to heavy industry (J/K), to technology transfer. Labor costs.

Where We Are Now: Plan E

We have been working on a digital web-based resource entitled *Cross Currents*, for several years. It focuses on the post-war history of the United States and Japan and the “cross currents” or influences the two countries have had on each other. This project, which is aimed at students in the United States and Japan, is written (and audio-recorded) in both Japanese and English. The experience of writing for the Web, with the limitations of what can be read easily on a screen, and writing text that we knew would be translated into Japanese, forced us to simplify our writing style and focus on the essence of what we wanted students to know. We decided that the lessons we learned from developing *Cross Currents* might well apply to a book on modern East Asia. And so we developed Plan E.

Plan E

In this plan we decided to focus more explicitly on “recent” East Asian history, concentrating on the years from 1945 to the present. We made this decision, which meant postponing the development of the middle chapters, because of the tendency to focus too much on the past and not on the present, with “present” meaning post-World War II. Thus we developed Plan E with the intentions of going back and picking up the threads or themes we think are absolutely essential to understanding East Asia and ruthlessly leaving out what is not essential. We are aware that there will never be consensus among historians as to what is and is not “essential” in a specific historical narrative. However, we have found that working in reverse chronological order has made it easier for us to identify the key concepts or ideas that connect the past and the present, and to connect those ideas over chapters. For example, it is impossible for students to understand how world-shattering Mao’s command to “destroy the four olds” during the Cultural Revolution was for Chinese society and Chinese families without an understanding of traditional Confucianism.

In order to reduce the overwhelming amount of student text that Plan E would **inevitably** involve, we have decided to write brief content units on given topics such as the Asian Financial Crisis. A variety of hand-on activities could then be used to help students grasp and synthesize the content contained in Plan E.

Conclusion

Our efforts to design an organizational structure for this book have made us very aware of the value of three questions. The first is our own, the “what” or content question posed earlier, namely, “What does a tenth or eleventh grade student need to know about modern East Asia?” The second is a “why” question, that perennial student grievance posed as a query that is familiar to history teachers everywhere: “Why do I have to learn this stuff? And what does it have to do with me?” It is a valid question. And if we cannot answer

it, if we cannot help students see how the past is influencing the present, then, indeed, why do they have to learn this stuff? And what does it have to do with them? The third question is also our own: “How can we best help students and teachers understand how the past affects the present?” We are optimistic that this framework for a high school textbook focused on China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan; Japan; and South and North Korea is an initial step in helping teachers help their students understand how the past affects the present not only in East Asia but also in the larger context of human history.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author acknowledges the many team members who have worked on the Curriculum on Asian and Pacific History—Eileen H. Tamura, Noren W. Lush, Chance I. Gusukuma, Francis K. C. Tsui, Warren Cohen, and Lisa Ritts.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ *Asia in the Schools*, 26.
- ² *Asia in the Schools*, 30.
- ³ *Asia in the Schools*, 30–31.
- ⁴ Tamura et al, *China Understanding Its Past*, and Menton et al. *The Rise of Modern Japan*.
- ⁵ *National Standards for United States History, Exploring the American Experiences, Grades 5–12*, 1994; *National Standards for History, Basic Edition*, 1996.
- ⁶ Linda K. Menton and Eileen H. Tamura. *A History of Hawai’i*, vii.
- ⁷ *National Standards for World History*, 196, 222, 224.