

## **Action Plan for incorporating NCTA Studies**

David Poss

Integrating Asian studies into a course on American History poses challenges to me that would not be as difficult if I were teaching a course on World History. The period covered for this class is heavily weighted towards years following Reconstruction, which cuts out much of Asia's history. However, there is certainly the argument that one cannot learn about the United States without encountering other worlds. In that light, I would attempt to incorporate information, links or research points learned at the NCTA Conference when introducing periods where cultures met.

In looking at the textbook used, I have found the following areas that could be used as contact points:

- Chinese immigration to the West Coast in the mid-to-late 1800s
- Chinese Exclusionary Act
- Boxer Rebellion and Open Door Policy
- China and Japan's involvement in World War II
- Douglas McArthur and Japan following World War II
- The Communist Revolution and the Cold War
- The Korean War
- The Vietnamese Conflict
- Nixon and China
- Japan and China as emerging international leaders the world market

Being in an International Baccalaureate school (or at least that is the goal of our school), we are taught that the best way to view history is from all angles. Reality sets in when we are only given a certain amount of time to devote to subjects before being forced to move on so that our students can be ready for state standards tests. I would love to be able to fully develop programs that look at how the Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese or Korean populations came to the same conflicts with the United States. When teaching about these areas

When studying about the immigration booms of the 1870s and 1880s, we will have information in the text to find out what were the “pull” factors bringing immigrants to the United States. However, I want my students to be able to understand some of the “push” factors that may have been encouraging these same people to leave their country. What was happening in China with the end of the Qing Dynasty and its own population issues is as important to understand. We can see a similar story with these people being pushed off their land coming to America for the same opportunity that an indentured servant might have come for in the late 1600s or 1700s. We can study how the relative isolation on both sides would have bred distrust on the part of Americans in California and other western states so that they would have passed legislation denying previously-granted rights to Chinese-Americans. We can also see how the Chinese had a long history of inventions that far preceded the Western world discovery of the same items.

We look at a more incorporated history when we see the Open-Door Policy forced on the Chinese by the western world. In order to view that, the student needs to see how China and Japan became so easily taken over by the Western world. They should research the internal conflicts and revolutions that were going on in China and the reinventing of the Japanese ruling system to see both countries responses to western influence. As Japan moves into a position of power within Asia, the United States will become more involved as a peacemaker. An example is the case of Theodore Roosevelt’s negotiation of the Russo-Japanese War. Of course, by that time, Japan had entered the world as a military power after defeating China and beginning its imperialistic claim on the region of Manchuria.

What would have led Japan to “switch sides” from their siding with the Allies in World War I to being on the side of the Axis during World War II? Japan felt slighted (to put it mildly) under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. However, in order to understand this, we also need to see the connections to the restrictive immigration policies passed in this country as well as Japan’s exit from the League of Nations. We can understand how China came in on the same side as the United States through their conflicts with Japan. One would benefit from a closer study of the “rape of Nanking.” Students can research and present findings as to whether this led to the position Japan’s culture saw in American war propaganda. Americans certainly viewed the Nazi

regime and the Japanese in different lights even though the Nazis could easily be argued as eclipsing any brutality brought on by the Japanese. Students can study propaganda that was shown in this country in dealing with battling Adolph Hitler's Germany next to motivational footage and editorial cartoons used to crystallize opposition as well as support for battling the Japanese. The obvious answer seems to be the bombing of Pearl Harbor here, but the underlying feelings of discrimination existed long before the Japanese Zeros crashed into US Naval ships.

So, how does one go from such brutal fighting as seen in the Pacific front of World War II, to such relatively peaceful times following its conclusion. A study of the decision to drop the Atomic Bomb on Japan should not be clouded by our perception of right and wrong in the current world, but how could the Japanese accept the military occupation of their country by the conquering United States following such an act? We might be led to falsely believe that it was our psyche following Pearl Harbor that needs to be studied, but the better question is that of the Japanese mental state in the aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Curious too is the transformation of China since World War II. While we are in an American History class looking at how issues affect Americans, it would be hard to discuss the Cold War years without looking at Chinese Communism. It might also be interesting to study the differences between "Asian Communism" and the good old Russian variety. The United States may have focused its energy on the Soviet Union following World War II, but the Korean War certainly brought Asia back into the forefront. Students should be aware that the conflicts in Korea, and later in Vietnam, were as much about internal strife and theories of unification as the superpowers playing cards with one another using these countries as the deck. A closer look at the Communist Revolution and the new place in Asia China obtained after the War will allow the student to better understand these conflicts. The American government's refusal to accept mainland China as the recognized entity rather opting for Taiwan as the official government can be seen as ridiculous as the current Chinese viewpoint of Taiwan as a "breakaway" republic. The foreign policy of "containment" and the idea of the "domino theory" in dealing with the issue of communism have explain the motivation of the United States for its presence in Southeast Asia, but the Vietnam Conflict should also be seen as another attempt by China at controlling the tiny country of Vietnam.

A better understanding of Chairman Mao's economic policies helps us understand how President Nixon could re-establish ties (loosely used) with his still formidable foe. From that point on, the United States has been forced to see China as both a gigantic marketing region yet to be tapped as well as an economic force to be reckoned with. In looking at the ladder, one could study similarities and differences between the post-War Japanese economy and the same Chinese economy.

How were the Japanese able to rebuild in such a relatively short period of time? Which country poses more of a threat to United States interests? Is our relationship with both on equal footing? Is Korea going to be the next giant or are they already there? These reviews may help students see where we are heading in the next generation with relation to the countries in Asia, both as consumers and producers.

As stated earlier, Signal Mountain Middle / High School is in the process of becoming an IB School. Incorporating an emphasis on writing remains a key to effective study under IB guidance. Students taking part in this U.S. History class should be able to develop "essential questions" related to various periods of time bringing in our ever-changing relationship with the major players on the Asian scene. While it is a difficult balancing act in devoting time to study foreign regions, we all have to realize that the study of "us" cannot take place without a deeper understanding of "them."