Divided into seven chapters, the compact A Vietnam War Reader is a brilliant guide to one of history’s most analyzed conflicts. This volume’s excellence is rooted in the editor’s choice of documents and his narrative introductions to each chapter; every chapter introduction concludes with questions for discussion. Professor Michael H. Hunt brings a lifetime of knowledge and scholarship to this edited book. Very few, if any, scholars have the gift for succinct, engaging narrative combined with an encyclopedic knowledge of this subject. And while the author may have strongly-held opinions on his topic, he asserts at the outset that, “Throughout I have tried to keep my own views on a leash so that readers will feel free to grapple on their own with the important questions still surrounding the Việt Nam War” (xiv).

What makes Hunt’s volume stand out from similar studies is his scalpel—he knows how to discriminatedly choose the heart of a long document and make it compelling to various types of readers.

Chapter one, “Setting: Colonialism and the Cold War (to 1954)” opens with Nguyễn Đình Chieu’s 1861 funeral oration honoring peasants who fought the French and closes with President Eisenhower’s correspondence with Winston Churchill regarding the ongoing Battle of Dienbienphu. In between these two documents, Hunt puts in other sources that help explain Việt Nam’s French colonial history. One such document is Hồ Chí Minh’s September 2, 1945, declaration of the founding of the Democratic Republic of Việt Nam. Hunt’s inclusion of this speech is not surprising, and it often appears in other such books on the war. What makes Hunt’s volume stand out from similar studies is his scalpel—he knows how to discriminate choose the heart of a long document and make it compelling to various types of readers. All the while, one never feels short-changed by reading the edited documents, because their main topics are always highlighted. In fact, the rather pithy presentation engages the reader.

Professor Hunt states that in this reader he gives the Vietnamese and Americans equal time. He also provides a balanced perspective to the differing opinions in each camp. For example, in one document Under Secretary of State George Ball notes in 1965 that America’s involvement in
This Is China
The First 5,000 Years
HAIWANG YUAN, RONALD G. KNAPP, MARGOT E. LANDMAN, AND GREGORY VEECK, EDs.
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126 PAGES, ISBN: 978-1933782201, PAPERBACK
Reviewed by Terrae Fogarty

This Is China: The First 5,000 Years is a useful addition to many AP World History classrooms. The book effectively introduces five thousand years of history in only 192 pages. The abridged narrative smartly creates a detailed overview of China that teachers can use as a supplement or as a summer reading topic. The book provides material to build both a basic and thorough understanding of Chinese history, and it certainly can be used in high school world history classes of any level as well as the college classroom. In the AP classroom, This Is China: The First 5,000 Years becomes a centerpiece for historical understanding.

Teachers often find that their students lack the “big picture” for any given civilization much less being able to understand the interconnectedness of the world over time. An advantage for this book is that it covers China chronologically and details how one era began as the other ended. The editors use pictures, dynasty charts, and dates to reinforce the notion of where the reader is in time. The chapters are short, yet subdivided to help readers know the focus of the discussion. Sidebars provide additional information for a more focused look at important historical personalities as well as “topics for further study.”

In each chapter, the editors provide two very helpful resources for both educators and students in the form of web-based materials and a “thought experiment.” The “thought experiments” enrich classroom discussion and debate and give both the educator and students provocative questions to ponder individually or as a group.

This Is China: The First 5,000 Years is an easy-to-read overview that serves as a platform upon which teachers can build. While it offers the fundamentals on Chinese geography, dynasties, the republic, and contemporary history from Mao to the present, instructors may want to supplement this book with other sources on Chinese history, especially for upper level history courses. This Is China: The First 5,000 Years provides a manageable and stimulating approach to a subject that has long frustrated some students. Students may now wrestle with Chinese history, feel a sense of accomplishment, and win the struggle to understand China.

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