

SELF-DESIGNED SIMULATIONS IN THE TEACHING
OF ASIAN HISTORY

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Asian history often seems so exotic and remote to students that it poses special problems for the teacher. Two of the major problems are humanizing the Asian experience and changing students from passive notetakers (filling their notebooks with strange names) into active participants in the learning process. One resource I have found helpful in this regard has been the rich treasure of Asian literature available in English translation. The Dream of the Red Chamber or Pa Chin's Family reveal much about Chinese society; a novel like Yukio Mishima's Runaway Horses speaks vividly about the mood of Japan in the 1930's; Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve, which was written in English, has dramatized village India for numerous students. I have also had students write research papers drawing material from such English language newspapers as The North China Herald, The Japan Mail, and The Japan Advertiser.¹ But of all the techniques I have tried, the most exciting for me has been the use of self-designed simulations. For those interested in role-playing and simulations there are countless packaged games available, in all price ranges and with all kinds of paraphernalia.² But I have found it more practical to design my own to fit my particular classroom situation. And students seem to respond better to such a simulation because they know it was tailored, and refined through experience, by their teacher for them. In this brief essay I would like to describe some of my self-designed simulations, suggest some reasons why they are valuable, discuss how I go about designing a simulation, and indicate some other possible topics for simulations in Asian history.

The first simulation I designed was of the Chinese Civil Service Examination, with students playing roles as Examiners and Degree Candidates.³ I reserved the role of Emperor for myself. The exam, created by students playing their roles as Examiners, is based on selections from the Analects and Mencius. I simulate the traditional emphasis on form rather than content by requiring that an essay and a poem be written in a prescribed style. The essay, explicating a quotation from the Analects or Mencius, has to be written in a modified 8-legged style; the poem, on another quotation, has to conform to a given rhyme scheme. I simulate the Confucian concern for propriety by having students dress and act with appropriate decorum. Many don Chinese clothes (or their conception of them), and there is much elaborate bowing and deferential language. I simulate the traditional geographic quota system by stating that no dormitory can have more than one successful candidate. This creates a very competitive atmosphere among dormmates and roommates who have been used to studying together. I allow attempts to curry favor or bribe the Examiners and the Emperor. However, everyone is informed that one of the Examiners holds a secret concurrent appointment as censor, ordered to report such wrongdoing to the Emperor. But only the Emperor and the censor know who holds the secret concurrent appointment.

After the simulation I require written follow-up reports, and I strongly recommend written or oral follow-ups which ask the students to articulate their insights. I usually ask them to discuss such questions as: what they learned from the simulation; how it altered or deepened their understanding of historical issues; in what way their reactions differed from those of actual historical figures, and why; what larger insights they gained about their own personalities and those of their classmates; how the simulation might be improved; etc. To my pleasure I usually find that students have benefited a great deal. This simulation humanizes the exam system for them, and they can better identify with the feelings of a traditional exam candidate. They feel similar tensions, wondering what the exam will be like and how they will perform. They feel similar uncertainties about what standards the Examiners will use in the grading. They are unsure whether they should demonstrate originality or stick to safe ideas and

cliches. They wonder whether to cite contemporary practical examples or rely on vague moralistic abstractions. They feel boxed in by the emphasis on prescribed forms and calligraphy rather than content. They feel resentful over the quota system, especially if they come from a dorm with many candidates. All these feelings are reasonable approximations of the emotions of real degree candidates in traditional China.

A second self-designed simulation deals with the negotiations preceding the Opium War, between the British and Chinese in 1840.⁴ Groups of students compose the two negotiating teams, each choosing its leader (Commissioner Lin and Captain Elliot). The historical setting and the basic objectives of each side are briefly described. The students are to negotiate through written exchanges or in face to face meetings, attempting to agree on a treaty and avoid war. Students are not restricted to duplicating the actual historical past. They can exercise their imaginations, provided that their behavior is "historical" in the sense that it is within the character of their roles and might have happened. Students are required to bargain in good faith, but if negotiations are unsuccessful either side can initiate an action (such as a British attack or a Chinese boycott). That action, if judged historically conceivable, will be communicated to the other side for its reaction.

Students inevitably get quickly and deeply into their roles. The Chinese team has few bargaining options at their disposal. They want to rid China of the "barbarians," yet their sense of superiority prevents them from offering meaningful concessions. Having no means to impose their will on the British, they usually resort to a variety of ingenious measures to stall or obfuscate the issue. The British team, which usually begins the negotiation optimistically thinking that reason will prevail, grows increasingly frustrated at the delaying tactics of the Chinese and angered by their arrogance. They become more insistent in their demands and sometimes quite ill-mannered in behavior. This offends the Chinese team and reinforces their sense of superiority. The usual outcome is war, just as occurred historically.

This simulation, which lasts several days, involves such clashes in viewpoint that it sometimes creates friction which persists outside of class. Students on opposing teams will remain hostile toward one another even when outside class. And even students on the same team will experience tension because of disputes over the proper strategy. These tensions have at times continued for weeks after the simulation was over, affecting normal class discussions on other topics. But this risk, I feel, is more than offset by the intellectual enthusiasm which the simulation generates.

Using a format similar to that described above, I have also designed a simulation of the pre-Pearl Harbor negotiations between the Japanese and the Americans.⁵ In August, 1941, the Japanese Prime Minister, Konoye, proposed a meeting with President Roosevelt in Hawaii for a broad discussion of issues concerning American-Japanese relations. F.D.R. was at first inclined to accept, but he was dissuaded by Secretary of State Cordell Hull, who believed it would be interpreted as a sign of weakness by the Japanese. This simulation assumes that Roosevelt's response was affirmative, and a meeting has been convened in mid-August, 1941. Representing the U.S. are Roosevelt, Hull, and their aides. Representing Japan are Konoye, Ambassador Nomura, and their aides. Again, students are divided into the two negotiating teams, bargaining options are described, and the goal is to negotiate a settlement which avoids war. The teams are much more equal in terms of bargaining leverage in this simulation, and one might hope that a spirit of mutual understanding would permit a peaceful compromise. Yet if both teams adhere to their roles--mistrusting each other's motives, refusing to make concessions lest they be interpreted as a sign of weakness, and justifying their positions in moralistic terms--that spirit of mutual understanding never develops.

One final simulation I have designed is the Liberation of Women in a Chinese Village. The setting is a village in China in 1949. It has recently been liberated by the Chinese Communists and the women are trying to fanshen (that is, "turn over" or overthrow all the old values). The women of the village have been organized into a Women's Association, but the Chinese Communists have left the village for more urgent business elsewhere. To test the level of consciousness of the villagers, the Communists have asked the village to draft a Declaration of Women's Rights. The Communists hope the Declaration can obtain the approval of the three major groups in the village: the Women's Association, the Husbands, and the Mothers-in-Law. If this is impossible, the Communists have left instructions that a Declaration be drafted which has the approval of two groups out of the three.

Students, thus, are divided into three role-playing groups: (1) Women of the Women's Association; (2) Husbands; and (3) Mothers-in-Law. The objective is to draft a Declaration of Women's Rights which is acceptable to all three groups. Members of a group may disagree with each other in the process of discussion, but a majority vote will determine the group position on any specific issue. If it proves impossible, as it usually does, to draft a Declaration acceptable to all three groups, then participants must turn their attention to the business of bargains, compromises, and trade-offs in an attempt to form an alliance between two groups which can agree upon a Declaration. Whichever group is left out will obviously be faced with a Declaration unfavorable to its interests, so it should frantically try to detach one of the members of the alliance by offering it a better deal. The simulation ends when a Declaration is drafted and signed by the leaders of at least two of the groups. At a minimum, the Declaration of Women's Rights must address the following issues:

- a. Whether women and men should enjoy equal rights under the law.
- b. Whether women should have the right to move about freely and to organize themselves into a Women's Association.
- c. Whether women and men should have the right to choose their own marriage partners; and whether each should have the same rights with regard to divorce.
- d. Whether women should be allowed to accept paid employment, and whether women and men should receive equal pay for equal work.

What are the values of simulations? First and foremost to me is that they arouse active student involvement in the learning process. Students, quite simply, find them fun and respond enthusiastically. And one of the special benefits is that sometimes the weaker students or the shyer ones surprise you with their enthusiasm. I would not recommend a course composed exclusively of simulations. Mine are always scheduled after extensive reading and classroom discussion on the historical topics involved. Students are thoroughly familiar with the historical setting and the key historical facts. They know what is "historical" and what the legitimate scope is for acting creatively. Used in moderation, with adequate preparation and more conventional teaching approaches, simulations can enliven the classroom. Second, simulations are excellent for teaching students some of the intangible skills associated with a liberal education. They improve their ability to formulate an argument and present it logically. They better understand the problems of conflict resolution and of communication. They learn how words can be misinterpreted, especially when they are contained in written messages with no chance for personal clarification. And since this is true despite a common language, students realize how much more trouble is likely when translation between languages is involved. They develop an awareness of how differences in background and outlook can produce

irreconcilable conflicts. Someone else, in all sincerity, may feel deeply but differently from you because of a different perspective. Finally, simulations often inspire students to immerse themselves in the subject matter in order to play their roles better. This is especially true in the Opium War and Pearl Harbor simulations, where both sides pore over books for ammunition to use in bargaining or negotiating. Each seeks factual information which might allow them to show inconsistencies or hypocrisy in the position of the other side.

How do I go about designing a simulation? Actually there are unlimited approaches, and each teacher should experiment to see what fits his practical classroom situation. I have found one useful approach is to zero in on an important but manageable area of controversy. I have students play different roles or participate on teams representing different points of view. I have the teams formulate their own strategy (this requires debate within the teams); then they must negotiate through written messages or face to face to resolve the conflict. It is important to require that the resolution results in some written document. Often people will think they agree if they are talking, but their divisions become clear when they are forced to put their supposed agreement in writing. The simulations take place within an historical setting, with basic background information provided. But students should not have to follow a script. They should act creatively so long as their actions are within the character of their roles and might have happened. This approach will sometimes produce surprises, and you run some risks. But the results will justify the risks.

The method I have used has the distinct advantage of being simple, allowing easy adaptation to different historical issues.⁶ It might be used in a variety of settings in Asian history. With some planning and experimentation, workable simulations could surely be developed for:

1. A debate between classical Chinese philosophers, assisted by their disciples, on some issue.
2. The love affairs of Prince Genji.
3. The Meiji Restoration.
4. The Sino-Japanese War of 1937.
5. Negotiations between Muhammad and the citizens of Mecca.
6. The Arab-Israeli conflict.
7. The partition of India in 1947.

These are just suggestions. The love affairs of Prince Genji intrigues me the most, and I may try to develop it for my next semester's course on Traditional Japan. Tentatively, what I have in mind is for students to familiarize themselves with the mood of the Heian Period from such books as Tale of Genji, Pillow Book, and Ivan Morris' World of the Shining Prince. Then I would divide students into several teams--one playing Prince Genji and his attendants, and the others playing would-be paramours of Genji and their maids. The goal would be for one of the potential paramours to win Genji's favor and entice him to her room. The would-be paramours would compete with each other by exchanging letters, poems, and gifts with Genji (by use of messengers), and exciting his interest with whatever other historically conceivable means at their disposal. Genji's attendants and the paramours' maids would serve as messengers; but they would also assist in the writing of letters and poems, and in the formulation of strategy. Tension must be allowed to build over several class sessions, and then

Genji will make his choice as the climax of the simulation. Moving out of his apartments, in all his splendor and surrounded by his attendants, he will make his way to the room of his chosen one.

The above Genji simulation is in a very rough form. But this is the way I begin to design a simulation. Inevitably, unforeseen problems arise when it is first used in a classroom, and I learn from experience. I would be very happy to hear from readers about their experiences with simulations, in Asian history or other fields of history.

NOTES

¹The North China Herald (1850-1941) is available on microfilm from Research Publications in New Haven, Connecticut. The Japan Mail (1886-1916) and The Japan Advertiser (1916-1938) are both available on microfilm from the Library of Congress.

²See the extensive list in Cheryl L. Charles and Ronald Stadskev, eds., Learning with Games (Boulder, Colo.: Social Science Education Consortium, 1973).

³A detailed description is in Asian Studies Professional Review, III (Spring, 1974), 31-35; reprinted in Focus on Asian Studies, XXXVI (Winter, 1976), 19-22.

⁴A detailed description is in The History Teacher, IX (February, 1976), 210-216.

⁵Neither this simulation on Pearl Harbor nor the one on the Liberation of Women in a Chinese Village, described later, has appeared in article form. I would be happy to send copies of the instructions distributed in class to anyone who wishes them.

⁶More complex, but fascinating, additional simulations on Asia can be found in Robert Oxnam, The Ch'ing Game (New York State Education Department, Foreign Area Materials Center, 1972), and Noel R. Miner, "Simulation and Role-Playing in the Teaching of East Asian History," The History Teacher, X (February, 1977), 221-228.