TEACHING INDIA AND CHINA IN A WORLD HISTORY CURRICULUM

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Introduction: Significance of India and China in World History

India and China represent two of the core Asian traditions as well as two of the oldest strands in the fabric of world civilizations. Indian and Chinese religions, philosophies, art, literature, technologies, and social systems have played a fundamental role in defining the human heritage and thus merit a careful assessment of their role in the world history curriculum.

Historically, India and China have been seminal influences on many other societies and cultures of Asia. For example, it was in Chinese that the Japanese, the Koreans, and the Vietnamese first learned how to read. Similarly, a large part of Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, and the Himalayan people were greatly influenced by the Indian culture. And Buddhism, originating from India, became and still remains an important religion in several Asian countries, including China and Japan. India and China have also influenced the making of the modern world. Chinese inventions of the printing press, gun powder, and the compass were crucial to the later success of the Europeans, just as Indian inventions and innovations in science, medicine, and mathematics contributed to the emergence of these disciplines. Indian discovery of zero and developing of numerals, mistakenly referred to as Arabic numerals, revolutionized the mathematical technique of the world. Thus, the study of these key Asian societies is intrinsically important for an understanding of the rest of Asia and is relevant as well to the historical understanding of the emergence of the modern world. From a more contemporary perspective, India and China—with more than forty per cent of the world's population today—represent the two leading developing countries that are of growing attraction to consumer and labor-oriented industries of the West.

The distinctiveness of Indian and Chinese civilizations lies not merely in their antiquity, but, more importantly, in their continuity and diversity. Given the longevity of Indian and Chinese civilizations, teaching about either of these cultures can be both fascinating and frustrating. But more importantly, teaching about India and China in a world history course poses some real challenges. For example, Indian and Chinese traditions are often imaged and imagined in the West as static and unchanging, or as bizarre and mysterious. Thus, the challenge for the teacher is not so much to provide basic knowledge about Indian and Chinese societies, but rather to expose students to the connection between images and realities and to the dynamic pattern of change and continuity characterizing the two civilizations. Then, there is the challenge of time. How much time (measurable in class periods) should be devoted to discussion of Indian and

Chinese societies in a world history survey? Related to the question of time is that of topics: what to discuss and what to discard? Equally important are concerns teachers have about the extent of depth and detail. There is also the difficulty of how to communicate concepts that are completely foreign to many of our students.

While it is difficult to offer precise answers to these questions, it is possible to address them within the specific context of one's overall structure of and approach to the teaching of world history. If the structure entails an integrated approach to world history, for example, it is hard to measure time to be spent on a specific culture in terms of class periods just as the question of depth and detail might be subject to a given level of student-teacher interests in a certain topic. As to facilitating the grasping of unfamiliar concepts by our students, I urge my students to step out of their mental make-up to understand the "different" and the "other" within their proper cultural contexts.

This paper is not meant to be prescriptive. Rather, it suggests inclusion of select themes in teaching India and China as parts of a world history survey. Therefore, the themes selected are not meant to provide a comprehensive coverage of Indian and Chinese histories, but are meant rather to promote understanding of India and China in a comparative and global context. Secondly, I have deliberately avoided the issue of dividing the themes according to any particular periodization. This is because many of us teach the survey over three quarters and others over two semesters. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of India* and *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of China* can be used as works of general reference. These provide precise coverage to selected topics in thematic chronological order. Suggestions for further reading follows each topical essay.

In teaching world history, I emphasize a comparative approach. This format has several advantages. It engages students in a meaningful intellectual exercise to identify the unique qualities characterizing an individual civilization, while allowing them to grasp more effectively the similarities between civilizations. This approach also enables students to focus on larger issues and trends that characterize human history and thus helps broaden their perspectives. In the case of India and China, for example, a comparative analysis can be applied beginning more than three thousand years ago. At the very dawn of history, both evolved as river-based civilizations. Since then, conflict and interaction with the outside world have been a constant refrain in Indian and Chinese histories and have led to major transformations of these societies. However, the two cultures are characterized by strong currents of continuity despite revolutionary changes. For example, in both countries, classics composed originally in ancient times are still read and revered in one version or the other.

As I begin teaching India and China, I usually ask students to share their images of and associations with Indian and Chinese cultures and peoples. This brief but informal discussion helps me to understand how the students have come to acquire their impressions about India and China (e.g., through films, novels, newspapers, television, personal contact, or academic training). I then use this context to discuss the diverse range of scholarly and popular views about Indian and Chinese societies and raise key questions related to the subject, such as the impact of dominant discourse in shaping images about

other cultures by taking the case of the Orientalist discourse (see Edward Said, *Orientalism*) in shaping Western images about the "Orient" and "Orientals."

Land and People

A discussion of "imaginative" geography and culture explicit in terms such as the "Orient" and "Orientals" can be juxtaposed with discussion of the theme, "Land and People of India and China," which examines their specific place in world geography, especially on the Asian land mass, and the impact of geographical features on their cultures. K. N. Chaudhuri's *Asia Before Europe* locates these two countries as two major centers of Asia and provides a global and comparative framework for their study along the Braudelian model. A discussion of the physical geography of India and China provides students with a thorough orientation to the similar and unique physical features of the two countries and their impact on the shaping of Indian and Chinese history, whereas a discussion of the cultural geography of India and China exposes students to their numerous languages or dialects as well as to their complex cultural contours. Time permitting, I have students do a short group exercise of mapping India and China, consulting historical atlases and wall maps. I conclude the discussion of this theme by fleshing out the connection between geography and history by examining how, for example, the influence of the Himalayas, rainfall, and the monsoons historically have affected these people; or how the geographical factors had influenced the relative exposure of India to and isolation of China from the outside world via land for many millennia.

The connection between geography and history can be extended further by an examination of the Indus and the Yellow river valley civilizations in the global context of riverine civilizations. This comparative analysis enables students to become aware of the similarities and differences of the two civilizations, keeping in mind the larger global context of river valley civilizations such as the Euphrates-Tigris valleys, the Indus river valley, the Nile river valley, and the Yellow river valley, while appreciating the distinctive and unique characteristics of each. Selected portions from *Harappan Civilization* and *Archeology of Ancient China* can serve as a useful basis for discussion of debates on and sources of information for the pre-history of India and China.

The Emergence and Evolution of Traditions

As the course focus moves from prehistory to an examination of the origins and evolution of ancient traditions, we can revisit India and China–two of the oldest traditions. First of all, in a very brief manner, students can become familiar with the ancient-most sources of Indian and Chinese traditions: the Epic and Vedic Literature and the Chinese Classics. Focusing on selected excerpts drawn from *Sources of Indian Tradition* and *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (a more important source for social history is *Chinese Civilization*), I examine Indian and Chinese cosmology, world view, and the role of ritual and sacrifice in the two traditions. This discussion may be enriched through examples drawn from the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata*, in the case of India, and *Li Chi* or *I-Ching*, in the case of China. However, it is important to discuss the above in the context of "Great Traditions" versus "Little Traditions." For an understanding of popular and folk

traditions as "Little Traditions" the above discussion may be balanced with the inclusion of select folktales from India and China. These tales can be readily found in *Folktales in India*, edited by R. K. Ramanujan, and *Chinese Fairy Tales*, edited by Moss Roberts.

The way is now paved for a more specific discussion of the evolution of Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism in India and of Confucianism and Taoism in China. Students need to be warned about the complexity characterizing these traditions, which cannot be comprehended with a linear or causal model. Illustrative of the questions to be examined here are taking Hinduism as a case in point: What is Hinduism? Is it a religion or a philosophy? Is it earthly or metaphysical? Is it spiritual or material? Is it polytheistic or monotheistic? Is it a social practice, or a complete way of life?

The discussion of Buddhism and Jainism can be used to stimulate further comparative and global thinking among students. For example, this discussion might focus on an examination of how Jainism and Buddhism emerged in India in the context of changing socio-religious trends, and why Jainism remained totally inside India, while Buddhism spread outside of the Indian subcontinent. In the same manner, the spread of Buddhism from India to China can be used to illustrate the connectedness of world regions during ancient times. *Ancient India and China* by Liu Xinru is a useful reference on this subject.

A related issue to examine in this context is the relation of these religious systems to Indian and Chinese social structures. Using excerpts from the *Bhagvad Gita* or *Dhammapada* and the *Analects* or *Tao te Ching* will allow us to examine the connections between religious or moral imperatives and the evolving social and political structures in India and China. Here, Hindu sanctions of social behavior, for example, the Four Ends of Man (*Dharma, Artha, Kama,* and *Moksha*) and the Four Stages of Life (the four *ashrams: Brhmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha,* and *Sanyasa*) as illustrated in the *Gita*, can be compared to the Buddhist sense of righteousness and *dhamma* or duty, as illustrated in the *Dhammapada* and to the Confucian values of order and harmony explicit in the *Analects* and Taoist way in the *Tao Te Ching*.

In addition to examining the role of social codes and religious sanctions in these societies, it is useful to reflect on the place of individual and family in the larger social and political structures of India and China, especially when the majority of our students are unfamiliar with such issues. The ideas of order and harmony can be examined through a reference to hierarchy and stratification as organizing principles in these societies. Once again, the two societies lend themselves to comparisons: the role of Jainism and Buddhism in shaping the Mauryan state in India and the role of Confucianism in shaping the Han Chinese society. The global theme of the ancient empires can be used as a context to discus the rise of Magadha and the Mauryan empire in India, and the rise of Changan and the Han empire in China. This theme again is representative of the interconnectedness of history through a discussion of empires and imperial expansion elsewhere in the ancient world.

Later, the discussion of Indian and Chinese empires can be resumed in the context of the Gupta period in India and China's second imperial age during the T'ang to raise another question about how Buddhism posed a challenge to Hindu society in India just as

it did to the Confucian state in China. Use of primary sources, such as Han yu's *Memorial on Buddhism*, can help underscore the changing intellectual and social trends in T'ang China. In both societies these developments were followed by the revival of classical traditions: the crystallization of Hinduism in the Gupta period and the revival of Confucianism in T'ang China. A visual window on the classical age in India during the Gupta period and on T'ang cosmopolitanism can be provided through a slide presentation on Classical India and a video on T'ang China, *China's Cosmopolitan Age: The Tang.*

India and China's contacts with the Arab world, although starting earlier, became more frequent and significant during the medieval period. The long established trade between the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean became a subject of several notable Arabic works. Arab interest in India and China are also attested to by the records of numerous Arab travelers, ranging from Sulaiman the merchant to the globe trotter Ibn Battuta. In such accounts, Indians were seen as "men unsurpassed in science especially astronomy." The period between 500-800 was indeed remarkable for scientific activity in India, especially in astronomy and mathematics. For a long time it was believed in Europe that the symbol of zero and the decimal system of notations were of Arab origin (thus the misnomer, Arabic numerals), but it is now acknowledged by a majority of scholars that these passed from India to Europe through the Arabs.

Rise and Expansion of Islam in Asia

The rise and expansion of Islam is a major theme for medieval world history. Several important questions can be raised in this context about the advent of Islam in India and China. For example, why was the coming of Islam to India, beyond Sind, delayed until the tenth century? Why did Islam come to India not through Arabia but via the Khyber Pass, a strategic passage for all invaders of India from the northwest? Who were the people who brought Islam to India and China? These questions set a comparative and global context and allow students to grasp what was similar and what was distinctive about the spread of Islam in different parts of the world. In China, there were significant settlements of Muslim traders in South Chinese ports such as Canton, prior to the end of the T'ang era. Many Muslim troops sent by the Caliph to suppress the political rebellions in the region did not return home. They married local women and settled down in northwestern China, thus making Islam a significant minority religion there. In India, on the other hand, the coming of Islam was not only delayed, but it was accompanied by a strong political force that led to centuries of Islamic rule of the Indian subcontinent, and it paved the way for the establishment of the Mughal empire and a distinct Islamic art, architecture, and culture in the subcontinent. Again, *Asia Before Europe* is an insightful and useful scholarly resource for this theme.

While the Islamic onslaught was on the increase in India, a spirit of "refined introspection" characterized Sung China, in sharp contrast to the imperialistic mentality of the earlier Han and T'ang empires. The Sung represented an age of increased urbanism, literacy, artistic refinement, and technological, scientific, and agricultural advancement.

India and China can once again be compared. Both experienced invasions from the northwest between 1000-1300, and both cultures survived these major radical

interventions. Indian response to Islamic intrusion of the subcontinent might be compared to Chinese response to similar invasions, such as that of the Mongols. In India, despite several centuries of Muslim rule, Hinduism remained intact as the majority religion. Islam imbibed many cultural traits of Hinduism and vice-versa. Such an exchange created change as well as synthesis. An analysis of the *Bhakti* and *Sufi* movements, which evolved in India during the medieval period, reveals that these two movements shared a number of common characteristics. For example, both movements aimed at unity with god through personal love and devotion; both challenged the traditional guardians of religion, the *Pundits* and the *Ulema*, and recognized the significance of *guru* or the *pir*; both advocated the use of vernacular languages and appealed to the lower classes; and both led to a fusion of cultures. An examination of selected excerpts from these movements (see *Sources of Indian Tradition*, vol. 1) provides an insightful introduction to these cultural movements. Similarly, in spite of the changes and transformations resulting from the invasions of China, the ancient traditions of Dao, Confucianism, ancestor worship, and so forth continue to characterize Chinese society.

While Buddhism almost disappeared form its original homeland, the early medieval period witnessed its spread throughout central Asia. Tibet, Nepal, China, Korea, Japan, and parts of Southeast Asia. It was also from India that Islam spread to Southeast Asia. Similarly, the Mongol invasions of Euro-Asian land masses led to a wider spread of Chinese accomplishments, especially gunpowder and the compass (although the Arabs had been exposed to these prior to Mongols), which helped Europeans to launch what became known as the Age of Exploration. The "new order" imposed by the Mongols in what became the largest land empire known in history stimulated the transfer of ideas and artistic techniques across Eurasia just as it promoted new patterns of international trade. Abu-Lughold's *Before European Hegemony* is an interesting discussion of the pattern of cultural and commercial interaction across Eurasia during 1250-1350. Once again, the movement of peoples and ideas can be highlighted as ways for understanding the interconnectedness of history.

European Imperialism

The growth of transoceanic trade, with spices as its focus, allows us to understand early encounters between Asians and Europeans. It is important, however, to point out two things in this context. First, the spice trade to Europe was insignificant compared to total Asian trade or for that matter total Asian trade in spices. This trade was dominated by Indians, Arabs, and especially Chinese whose remarkable junks dominated the Indian Ocean. The gradual passing of this trade into the hands of Europeans marked a shift that tipped the balance of power in favor of the rise of the West. It might be useful to take a long pause here to raise the question: How or why did this shift occur? Second, the Europeans were peripheral to Asia prior to the nineteenth century. A more dominant trend prior to European dominance was the revival and reform of tradition in India and China. Excerpts from sections on Social Reform Movements (see *Sources of Indian Tradition* and *Sources of Chinese Tradition*) could be used to assess the nature of indigenous society, culture, and reform on the eve of European political intrusions into India and China. These

excerpts can be used for initiating a discussion of the revival and reform movements in India such as those led by Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanada Sarasvati, Swami Vivekananda, Kesab Chandra Sen, and others. This can help in providing a background using primary source documents for the understanding of the indigenous social reform movements prior to the efforts of the British evangelicals in eradicating "social evils" from the Indian society. Similarly, in the context of China, examination of the "Self-strengthening" movement, the restoration of Confucian morality, and the restructuring of civil and miliary governance, as well as the refurbishing of the Chinese economy, provide an important background to the understanding of the ensuing interaction between China and the West. For example, Feng Guifen's idea of making oneself strong became the guiding principle of the so-called Self-strengthening movement that promoted, among other things, the notion that China should "learn the superior barbarian techniques to control the barbarians." This discussion is particularly relevant and meaningful for reviewing the images the West had of the non-Western people, and vice-versa, using notions of the "barbaric" and the "civilized."

By and large, India during this time was easily accessible to the Western world, which led to its eventual colonization by the British. But a contrary trend toward isolationism during Manchu China resulted in what is known in the West as the "opening of China" by the western powers. It is, however, important to remember that the Chinese had traded with the world, including Europeans, for a long time. The Opium Wars were fought essentially to change the terms of trade in favor of Britain. (See Chang Hsin-pao, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War*.) The initial Indian and Chinese encounters with the West can be examined by focusing on early Western missionary and commercial activities in India and China. The film, *Pacific Century: the Two Coasts of China*, can serve as a valuable visual to foster discussion on this and closely related issues of broader significance.

The multifaceted theme of culture and colonialism can be examined further by focusing on the role of technology in shaping this interaction. Selected sections from Headrick's *The Tools of Empire* can be used to demonstrate the subjugation of these highly sophisticated and relatively vast civilizations by numerically insignificant Europeans. For example, it can be interesting to illustrate how the railways in nineteenth-century India and China served as tools of imperialism(s) and as vehicles of social transformations. The contributions of Davis and Sethia in *Railway Imperialism* and select clips from the new BBC series on "Locomotion: The World the Railways Made" might serve as additional resources to facilitate an understanding of this theme. The subsequent discussion might open up questions regarding the nature of imperialism(s), such as: What is meant by cultural and economic imperialisms? Students will find the discussion interesting if the focus can be on more concrete issues rather than simply on the "theories" of imperialism. For example, focusing on the agents, the missionaries, and the trading corporations such as the British East India Company might allow us to illustrate better the *cultural and moral* implications of their activities. The case of opium production in colonial India by the British to promote the illegal opium market in China and to get Chinese tea for the British market, for instance, can help highlight the complex nature of

western imperialism that manifested itself in many different forms in India and China. Two parallel trends–the transformation of traditions, on the one hand, and the complex interaction between the colonizers and the colonized, on the other–might be illustrated through novels and films, such as R. K. Narayan's *The English Teacher* or Orwell's *Burmese Days* in the case of India. A chapter from Spence's *To Change China* and/or the film *Family*, based on Pa chin's novel set in 1910, will serve the purpose of this theme in the case of China.

Nationalism, Revolution, and Independence

The nature and the making of national identities in India and China can be examined in a comparative context of nationalism and independence movements around the world. Selected excerpts from *Sources of Indian Traditions* (Vol 2) and *Chinese Civilizations*, as well as samplings from the literature of national awakening, Premchand's *Selected Short Stories* and stories by Lu Hsun, Ting Ling, and Yu Ta-fu, can be used here and critically integrated with films such as *Bharat Ki Khoj* (literally meaning, search for the Indian nation) and, in the case of China, *The Yellow Earth*. This helps make class lectures and discussions more interesting and lively. Questions such as, why, despite many similar trends, the two countries embarked on different paths in 1947 and 1949, can help students make more lasting connections between the past, future, and present. In groups (based on excerpts from *Sources of Indian Tradition* and *Chinese Civilization*), students might be asked to sketch brief biographical profiles of Gandhi and Mao to accentuate the comparative analysis of the two societies in the context of both the internal traditions and transformations and external forces in the West and the climate of the cold war. Also important to examine, in the context of nationalism, are the rise of two different trends in India and China: the rise of communalism (separate sense of Hindu-Muslim identities) in India and the rise of Communism in China. For example, in the context of nationalism, it might be useful to raise a question, why nationalism in India resulted in the creation of not one but two nations of India and Pakistan. This discussion can be combined with the film, *Division of Hearts*, which brings out the impact of partition of the Indian subcontinent on the ordinary people of India and Pakistan. Other questions to examine might include: What roles did the leaders versus the masses play in the transformation of history and historical change? In discussion of such questions, novels or short stories can be juxtaposed with relevant pieces of scholarly writings and films. For example, a novel by R. K. Narayan, *Waiting for the Mahatma*, might be juxtaposed with Sahid Amin's "Gandhi as Mahatma" in *Selected Subaltern Studies* and the film *Gandhi*. In the same manner, short stories by Lu Xun and Ting Ling provide a good exposure to the village in Chinese society, as a microcosmic phenomenon.

Democracy and Development

In concluding the world history survey one might review Indian and Chinese societies in the larger context of the modern-day-world. The two countries today are leading developing societies. Yet, the political cultures of the two countries are different from one another. India is the largest democracy in the world today, although there are

limits to the functioning of Indian democracy. The rise of fundamentalism, for example, poses a serious challenge to the functioning of Indian democracy. This theme can be fleshed out with Anand Patwardhan's film, *In the Name of God*. China perhaps can be seen as the largest authoritarian state in the world. A longish but highly thought evoking documentary, *The Gateway to Heavenly Peace*, effectively brings out the continuing tensions in China between the forces of authoritarianism and the promoters of democracy and freedom. Yet both China and India, share a common characteristic: the continuing interaction between modernity and tradition. The nature of this interaction, however, can be seen through a more specific examination of current topics–such as the role of authority versus democratic institutions; issues of population and poverty; human rights and human development; and women and children in the two societies–to help bring out differences between the two.

     Additional opportunities for gaining exposure to the present-day Indian and Chinese societies might be exploited through Indian and Chinese foods, films, and the like. Reading and discussion of selected portions from *Another India; Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China*, and *Dharma's Daughters* will allow examination f the role of patriarchy and tradition in shaping women's lives in modern China and India. This discussion might also include insights from the films *Kamla and Raji* (on Indian women) and *Small Happiness* (on Chinese women).

     The study of India and China in a world history survey course is not only vital to an understanding of human heritage, but it is also critical for an understanding of the twenty-first-century world.

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