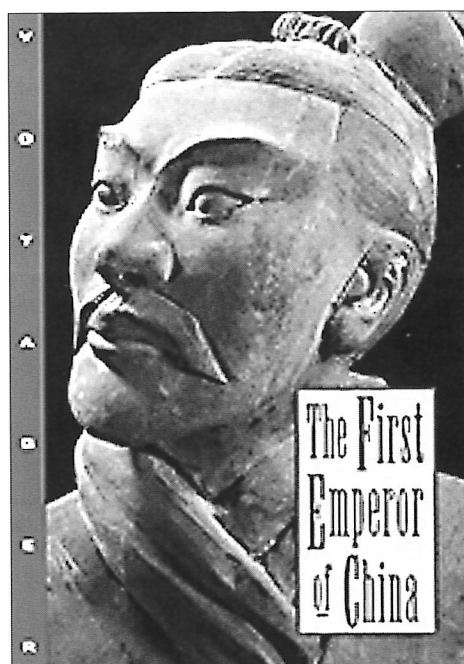# The First Emperor of China

THE VOYAGER COMPANY
FOR SOFTWARE DESIGN
NEW YORK, NY

VIDEODISC
CAV FORMAT
30 MINUTES

CD-ROM (v.1.02)
MACINTOSH OR
WINDOWS

The Videodisc version requires use of a laserdisc player and color monitor. The CD-ROM version requires an appropriate personal computer, 13" color monitor, and CD-ROM drive (double-speed recommended).

These two programs, especially the CD-ROM version, cover much more information than the title suggests. When supplemented by lectures or readings, they make excellent single-unit introductions to ancient Chinese civilization for students with little or no previous background in the subject. The enhanced special features of the CD-ROM succeed in stimulating initial interest in a remote but pivotal era of ancient Chinese history, the Qin Dynasty (221-206 B.C.E.). The colorful films, graphic images, and dramatic focus on the recent and fascinating archaeological discoveries dating from this period are sure-fire attention grabbers and should evoke positive responses and raise curiosity among students of all ages.

*The First Emperor of China* is of special interest to educators about Asia for many reasons. In this review, I will briefly describe the types of materials contained in the program and the differences between the videodisc and CD-ROM versions, and will proffer a few critical observations and suggestions.

The main attraction of this multimedia program, known in different formats as *The First Emperor of China,* is the wide range of audio-visual materials focusing on the spectacular archaeological discovery in 1974 of the underground terra cotta army dating from the time of China's first emperor, Shi Huangdi, founder of the Qin. The program, which is suitable for either academic or general audiences, contains both sound movies and still images providing abundant details on the archaeological excavations and museum near Xi'an, in Shaanxi Province, plus much scholarly information on Qin Shi Huangdi, Qin Reforms, Qin artifacts, the Great Wall, and the military. Since the program also includes a hefty sampling of material on the social and cultural context of ancient China generally, it provides a visually rich point of entry into the subject and therefore should find a durable niche in any course that covers the period. I use the 1991 videodisc version in class in introductory college courses and recommend the 1994 CD-ROM version for individual student use, although, with the proper equipment, the latter can be employed in class situations as well, including team or small-group collaborative sessions. Both programs are worthwhile instructional tools that will stimulate further exploration. While specialists and researchers will find much here that is already familiar, they too will want to have a look at these interesting presentations, for these are serious attempts at scholarly communication with a wide audience.

Assisted by an international team of scholars, and aided by financial support from Simmons College in Boston and a Libraries Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Dr. Ching-chih Chen of the School of Library Science at Simmons created "Project Emperor," as it was first known, in 1984. Dr. Chen's pioneering team was able to take advantage of the PRC's new spirit of openness and the cooperation of Chinese archaeologists and museum officials to collect as much audio-visual material as possible on a subject of worldwide fascination: the subterranean array of more than 7,000 life-size soldiers, horses, and chariots replicating portions of the first emperor's army. Traveling to China, the research and media team collected films, photos, and other electronically reproducible materials focusing on the society of the short-lived dynasty which produced these intriguing artifacts.

True to their initial goal of employing the latest technology to make the collected materials as accessible as possible to the widest audience, Dr. Chen's team organized and reproduced the information first on computer discs, then, with the assistance of the Voyager Company, repackaged and marketed the package as a videodisc, and then more recently as a CD-ROM. Over the years, the successive formats have reached an ever broader audience. Interestingly, while the total number of images has been progressively reduced, from tens of thousands to about two thousand, the transformation has evolved decidedly in the direction of enhanced accessibility, interactivity, and overall general appeal. The result is a scholarly and technical achievement of considerable merit, which will contribute greatly to the wider public appreciation of the archaeological finds and the historical era which produced them. Project Emperor thus represents one of the more ambitious and noteworthy multimedia endeavors in Asian Studies to date. As such, it will serve as a model for future cooperative ventures of similar type and scope.

The videodisc version, which I prefer for classroom use, comes in full-feature format (CAV), which means that by using the laserdisc player's remote controls, one can access every numbered frame of movie and still images stored on the disc. An accompanying brochure provides a handy catalogue of all images by sequence number, plus a cross-referenced index to facilitate searches by subject. There are also useful maps and a chronology of events in the Qin period. The videodisc technology allows the user an array of choices when playing the three short films, totaling a little under half an hour in length. There is one film each on the First Emperor, the Archaeological Museum, and an aerial view of the Great Wall. The user can view the films with either English or Chinese narration; freeze frames; go forward or backward in slow motion; or search the extensive image library for individual frames and stills. One can jump from one part of the disk to another, thus allowing many creative ways to present information. One slight drawback: one must precisely put in multidigit code numbers in order to retrieve single-image frames. A time-saving feature of current videodiscs is to include a bar-coded index of images which can be quickly and unerringly scanned with a pointer that instantly retrieves the desired frames. The producers ought to consider providing this convenience in any future upgrade. Since little textual or explanatory material is included in the videodisc version, its effective use in class requires that the instructor be well versed in the subject and familiar with the search features of the technology employed.

The 1994 CD-ROM version, which is actually a sophisticated multimedia HyperCard™ stack, lives up to expectations by providing a panoply of interactive features, including QuickTime™ movies (the same three movies as in the videodisc) that the user can control and play with either the English or Chinese commentary. This CD-ROM also adds hypertext versions of the film narratives in English, interactive maps (clickable by mouse), a glossary of key terms with their Chinese spellings, and sound links to their pronunciations in Chinese. The glossary terms in turn are linked to still images, and there is a separate image bank grouping more visuals under seventeen topics, from "Archers" to "Weaponry." Finally, there is also a chronology of events in Qin history and a clickable timeline of Chinese dynasties with terms again keyed to the glossary. The whole package runs smoothly using a simple, mouse-operated point-and-click system and provides plenty of opportunity for individual choice, sometimes with as many as twelve different options per page (or card). It is especially easy to use if one is already familiar with the typical Rolodex-style design and standard navigational techniques of HyperCard stacks. For those users not so familiar, however, provision of some further navigational explanations or aids would have been helpful. For example, despite the availability of balloon help, I only figured out on my own that the "G" (for Glossary) button activated the hypertext feature (why would one want it turned off?), and elsewhere, it was not obvious that additional "Ask the Experts" pages would appear only if one continued to move through the stack in the forward direction using the right arrow button. Still, the hypertext feature is a particularly useful enhancement in this version because clicking on boldface terms brings to the screen still images or maps, while underscored terms bring up helpful glossary definitions. Although far fewer still images are available in this version than on the videodisc, the CD-ROM more than makes up for this by adding new interactive maps, hypertext descriptions, an informative glossary, and a bibliography of more than 150 items.

The extensive and compact array of visually appealing materials available in the two formats makes *The First Emperor of China* a particularly attractive teaching aid, providing more flexibility than either a slide lecture or video alone. Having worked with both versions, I find the videodisc better suited for classroom instruction and the CD-ROM for individual student use outside the classroom. (For more limited budgets, or smaller classes, the CD-ROM could suffice, given a classroom projection unit to display the computer screen, or using multiple computers and small-group work.) The detailed images on the videodisc display nicely on a large (e.g., 24" or larger) monitor. (The movies and many images on the CD-ROM version are rather small on the computer screen.) If the instructor spends some time with the videodisc beforehand, s/he can select and tailor a class presentation from the abundant choices available much more effectively than one could in the past with a slide show. The difference here is that one can easily compare any two or more images from anywhere on the videodisc using the fast-search and freeze-frame features.

I usually begin a class employing the videodisc to view the three short films, with brief pauses for my own commentary and student questions, then move on to viewing a selection of still images, followed by time for the students to make requests regarding additional images they would like to view: more chariots, specific weapons, such as cross bows, maps, etc. If facilities and class size permit, a number of individual or group projects can be constructed around various groups of materials. Since this videodisc version of *The First Emperor of China* provides no reading material, in order to enrich the experience for the students, I require that they read supplementary materials, texts, and documents beforehand. In fact, because the interface features of the CD-ROM lend themselves so beautifully to the possibility, the producers really ought to include in any future edition a judicious selection of key primary documents, again with hypertext cross-links to explanations. That would be a welcome improvement, especially for course use. To provide a documentary complement to either version of *The First Emperor of China* as they now stand, I recommend use of the paperback, *Sima Qian, Historical Records: A Selected Edition*, a new translation by Raymond Dawson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), which focuses on the Qin period.

Users of the CD-ROM version may encounter a few technical

problems. It is necessary to install the supplied fonts onto your hard disk or the text will not display properly, resulting in lost lines of text (including in the bibliography) and some navigational problems. Also, one may encounter difficulties getting the "Mark card" feature to operate successfully. (A help number to call is provided with the software.) These are minor irritations, however. As for content, there are a few concerns. An occasional non-Pinyin spelling for Chinese words slipped in. Nanking should have been Nanjing, for example, to be consistent throughout, and the bibliography, while comprehensive, should have included the important volume by Guisso et al., which employs the same title as this program and serves as a good supplement to it.[1] More substantively, many users may be misled by the incorporation into the package of a film on the Great Wall as it exists today. They may wrongly conclude that this is the original wall or that it resembles the Qin version. Instructors need to explain to their students that the mostly Ming dynasty wall they are seeing on their screens is a much later development.

If the producers' desire was to provide for the novice an interesting interactive learning package to stimulate the mind and increase curiosity about ancient China and its civilization, they have succeeded admirably. This reviewer hopes they will not abandon the project now that the technology has improved accessibility and broadened the appeal, and that they will continue to improve the product until it approaches the fully comprehensive learning package on this important period of East Asian history that it could still become. This can be accomplished by updating the materials to include more recent discoveries, such as the excavation of Pit #2 begun in 1994,[2] providing more data on the still images and their sources, improving the navigational aids, expanding the "Ask the Experts" section (identifying the experts better would help), including some hypertext primary documents from the Qin era, and updating and annotating the bibliography. Then, East Asianists would be looking at one of their first electronic textbooks!

Roland L. Higgins

**NOTES**

1. R.W.L. Guisso, Catherine Pagani, and David Miller, *The First Emperor of China* (Toronto: Birch Lane Press, 1989).

2. See "The Second Pit of Qinshihuang's Terra Cotta Army Undergoes Excavation," *China Today* (January 1995): 36-42.

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The Voyager Company also offers a WWW Site Catalog: **www.voyagerco.com**

# Comparing Cultures
## *Readings on Contemporary Japan for American Writers*

*Comparing Cultures* is no ordinary writing text. It could just as easily be titled *Japan: An Introductory Reader*. The fifty-plus essays and book excerpts, along with extensive chapter introductions by the editors, make this book an excellent introduction to Japan for advanced high school or early college students. And, as the editors intended, it presents an innovative approach to English composition.

The editors divide the book into two parts which total eleven chapters. Each chapter consists of the editors' introduction, a number of readings, and suggestions for writing. Part one, the first two chapters, prepares students to enter a foreign culture. The editors' introduction to chapter one includes a discussion of the ways people often view other cultures. In the extreme, the two sides are "people are all pretty much the same" and "it is impossible for an outsider ever to read another culture accurately" (p. 7). The editors take a middle ground, and they hope to persuade their readers to do the same. To make their point, they include "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema," Horace Miner's famous spoof of an anthropologist's essay on American culture. Anthropology sharpened Miner's eye as he looked back on the U.S. So, too, the editors hope, students using *Comparing Cultures* will learn to view their own culture more carefully, as well as Japan's. As they state in the "Preface for Instructors," "We use a single culture, Japan, as an aid or foil to enable students to think and write about America with a fresh perspective" (p. v).

The second chapter of part one, "Thinking About Texts," presents the elements of a standard composition text: note taking, highlighting, and summarizing; journals, essays, and analyses. This chapter is supplemented by the appendix, "Doing Research," which explores additional writing concerns: using sources, conducting field research, and interviewing research subjects; audience, theses, and quotations. This aspect of the book benefits from the expertise of Sylvan Barnet of Tufts University, an author of many successful writing texts.

Merry White, associate professor of sociology at Boston University, uses her extensive background in Japanese studies to guide the editors in part two, "Readings for Cultural Comparison." Most of these nine chapters, which include growing up, courtship, consumption, and work, focus on life experience in Japan. Many of the readings, usually those written by journalists, refer to specific Japanese people and their lives: women in their twenties, homosexuals, *sumō* wrestlers, and company em-