

## MODERN ASIAN FICTION FOR TEACHING ASIAN HISTORY

Thomas H. Keene  
Kennesaw State College

Synopsis in the form of a briefly annotated bibliography of titles useful and appropriately priced for classroom use provided by the author. Comments on methods for classroom use and comparable titles by African authors may be found in Thomas H. Keene, "The Use of Local Fiction in Teaching Modern Asian and African History," *Teaching History*, Fall, 1987.

### I. SOUTH ASIA

#### A. India and Pakistan

Khushwant Singh, *Train to Pakistan*, 1956. (ISBN 0-394-17887-4) Grove Press (192 p.; \$3.25). Dramatic story of the disintegration of a Punjab village during the Partition Crisis of 1947.

#### B. India

Kamala Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*. (ISBN 0-451-122291-7) New American Library (185 p.; \$2.50). An Indian peasant woman tries to keep her family together as their village turns into an industrial town. A quick read that female students especially like.

R. K. Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets*, 1983. (ISBN 0-226-56828-8). University of Chicago Press (256 p.; \$4.50). Quite ordinary young people wait for their Mahatma (Gandhi).

Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 1981. (ISBN 0-380-58099-3) Avon (560 p.; \$4.95). Too difficult and too long for general consumption, but a rich tapestry of India since 1947 for the brave and persevering.

### II. EAST ASIA

#### A. China

Robert Van Gulik, *The Chinese Gold Murders*, 1979. (ISBN 0-226-8464-7). University of Chicago Press (224 p.; \$3.95). A western style murder mystery woven out of several traditional tales about the folk character, Magistrate Dee. Good introduction alerts students to Van Gulik's methods and some anachronisms.

Lao, She, *Camel Ziangzi*, 1981. (ISBN 0-253-31296-5) Indiana University Press (240 p.; \$6.95). Dickens-like realism about the harshness of life for a rickshaw "boy" in Beijing, ca. 1925. Yuan Tsung Chen, *Dragon Village*, 1981. (ISBN 0-14-005811-7). Penguin (285 p.; \$5.95). An autobiographical novel. The daughter of a wealthy Shanghai family stays on after her family flees the revolution. She helps with economic and political reform in one of China's poorest provinces. Good on village politics and on the contradictions felt by the young elites who both favor and fear the new revolution. Excellent for traditional ge college students.

Jo-hsi Chen, *Execution of Mayor Yin and Other Stories from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*, 1978. (ISBN 0-253-20231-0). Indiana University Press (248 p.; \$6.95). These stories offer a powerful sense of the smothering conformism and the other terrors of the Cultural Revolution.

Wang Mang, *Butterflies and Other Stories*, 1983. (ISBN 0-8351-1021-4) Panda Books (239 p.). This book of short stories is now out of print in North America, but it is well worth borrowing a copy and xeroxing a couple of stories to place on reserve. Stories such as these got Wang Mang sent into exile during the Cultural Revolution, but during the more open period that followed he rose to be Minister of Culture. Wang remains sympathetic to aims of the communist party, but retains a sharp eye for the moral complications that have accumulated since 1949. A good complement to the outsider's view offered by Jo-hsi Chen (above).

#### B. Japan

Lady Murasaki, *The Tale of Genji*, 1955. (ISBN 0-385-09275-X) Anchor Press (253 p.; \$4.95). The first book of the great classic set in medieval Japan's Heian court (c. 1000 AD).

Yukio Mishima, *Spring Snow*, 1975. (ISBN 0-671-43425-X) Washington Square Press (384 p.; \$2.95). Also, *Runaway Horses* 1975 (ISBN 0-671-43686-4) Washington Square Press (432 p.; \$3.50). These titles are volumes I and II of Mishima's, "Sea of Fertility" tetralogy. *Spring Snow* pictures aristocratic Japan during the period of transition to modern society just before the First World War. The main character, Kiyoaki, is self-absorbed and preoccupied with an archaic sense of form and beauty. *Runaway Horses* explores another



aspect of Japanese society; the samurai obsession with duty and sacrifice. Both novels are gorgeously written with an eye for visual and psychological details.

Junichiro Tanizaki, *Makioka Sisters*, 1981. (ISBN 0-399-50520-2) Perigee-Putnam (538 p.; \$8.95). Four sisters, each with different tastes and temperament, try to accommodate themselves to changing Japanese society on the eve of World War Two. Rather long, but considered by many Japanese their finest twentieth century novel.

Kobo Abe, *The Woman in the Dunes*, 1972. (ISBN 0-394-71814-3). Vintage-Random. (235 p.; \$3.95). Abe is the Japanese writer most often compared to Camus or Kafka. *The Woman of the Dunes* is a powerful allegory of contemporary Japanese life--and indeed, all life.