



Understanding China through Comics, Volume 1

Jing Liu

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In just three decades China has risen from being a Third World country to taking its place as the world's second largest economy. It has lifted over 600 million people out of poverty while half of the world - over three billion people - still live under the poverty line. The astronomical growth and the potential of China to become the next superpower has attracted wide attention.

These dramatic changes haven't necessarily come by choice. Internal and external pressures, both deeply rooted in history, have compelled China to metamorphose from being a static agricultural society into a diverse modern nation.

As a Beijing resident who has lived through the entire opening-up era that set the stage for today's China, I've experienced the scale and thoroughness of economic and social change. From an historical perspective, such change is irreversible. The great sacrifices and efforts of the Chinese people, both through time and in current events, have not been in vain, despite all the negative implications associated with a country growing at, as some would say, an unsustainable speed.

Understanding China through Comics includes 4 volumes:

Volume 1: The Yellow Emperor through the Han Dynasty (ca. 2697 BC - 220 AD)

Volume 2: The Three Kingdoms through the Tang Dynasty (220 - 907)

Volume 3: The Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms through the Yuan Dynasty under Mongol rule (907 - 1368)

Volume 4: The Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368 - 1911)

Understanding China through Comics, Volume 1 Details

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From Reader Review Understanding China through Comics, Volume 1 for online ebook

Sarah Holz says

I received this book through a Goodreads giveaway

The "big" nations always seem to have a sense of destiny about them. China has always basked in its sense of Self as an ancient civilization that has a glorious past and a blindingly bright future. And it has always been at its best when blending the two streams together. I am reminded of watching Buddhist monks play basketball in a temple courtyard in Beijing - China has always had a gift for both old and new. Jing Liu charmingly continues this through the presentation of complex dynastic history in the medium of accessible modern comic form. The oldest world civilizations have been around long enough that their history is always dramatically cyclical, and this book does an excellent job of showing this without falling into the trap of being repetitive. Even more incredibly, the author has created a narrative that can be understood and enjoyed by both relatively young children and adults at the same time. This multi-volume project would be a fabulous teaching tool for introducing Chinese history in the classroom, particularly Western classrooms where I think some of the biggest hurdles towards better international relations with China come from those of us outside simply not really knowing anything about the Real China.

James says

I really enjoyed this book and found it to be a really fun and insightful read. Jing's use of the comics medium is a great way to introduce readers to the history and culture of China, a topic which can certainly be more than a little overwhelming. Having had an interest in the history of the region for some time I was at least a little familiar with the information covered in the book which made it even more comfortable to read. I had several 'oh yeah, I remember reading this before' moments which was actually quite nice. Combine that with my innate love of comics and this book is definitely a win for me. Really a great book for my first ever GoodReads giveaway, so thank you very much for providing me with the opportunity to read this Jing!

I'm going to be giving this book to my daughter come the holidays. She is 7, so I think that the actual subject matter of the book will be slightly beyond her for the moment but she loves learning about other countries so I think she will really enjoy this. I'll hopefully be able to update the review in a couple months to let everyone know how the book was seen through a child's eyes as well!

Jen says

The skill set necessary to cover such an incredible amount of time and to do so in a graphic novel format - wow! Now that I have a basic understanding of the first 2900 years or so, off I go to explore 220-907 AD in volume two.

Dawn Betts-Green (Dinosaur in the Library) says

Excellent beginner's history of China, made easy in graphic novel form. Chinese history is a fascinating topic, but the sheer scope makes it hard to know where to start. Liu solves that. Looking forward to reading the next 2 volumes.

Eric Wallace says

Sometimes it takes a different approach to get readers like me into history...

I will admit that, while I might tout the belief that "Those who don't remember history will be condemned to repeat it," I don't willingly choose to read anything that smacks of "history" very often; and when I do, the subject is probably constrained to a topic I'm already engrossed in. So the chances of my learning about the thousands of years of China's history were pretty slim, despite my interest in their intriguingly-foreign culture.

In this series of books, Jing Liu has encapsulated the sweeping sagas of war and politics into bite-size pieces. This is not to say he has trivialized it; rather, it must have required careful research to be able to pull out the themes and lessons from these complex stories. And he has craftily presented this info, sometimes with depictions of individual people and their interactions, other times with charts and diagrams showing relevant comparisons.

In reading Volume 1 you will learn about the early dynasties from Shang to Han, how their rulers failed or lost their power, and--perhaps more importantly--how each contributed to the growth of the country and her people. Along the way you'll learn about influential philosophies like Confucianism and Taoism, the many decisions and challenges that governors face, the fragile symbiosis between the poor and the rich, and even some of the benefits of public education.

In the author's introductory notes, he states, "Putting China in its historical context makes it easier to understand where China is now." After reading this book I am certainly no expert on Chinese history or culture, but I have gained the desire to learn and explore even more; I look forward not only to the successive books in the series but also to opportunities to dig deeper into these stories from other sources. And I would say there's no doubt that with this book Jing Liu has succeeded in spreading a little cross-cultural understanding.

Campbell says

"Understanding china through comics" is the most fun way to learn about history I have ever experienced. I think that all fans of culture, history, and/or comics should read it

Alice says

The length and complexity of Chinese history can be really daunting. It's easy to just avoid trying - thinking

"I'll never get it". If that's true for you, you should read this series of books. You won't be an expert on Chinese history at the end of it (and you probably won't remember all the names involved either), but this gives a great overview, points out what's important in each period, and is interesting and entertaining at the same time! I can't wait until all the volumes are done!

???? says

I'm quite happy that I stumbled upon this book. It is illustrated beautifully and what seemed like a daunting scary topic full of difficult names and many dynasties became a pretty enjoyable read and extremely informative.

China is a fascinating country and it's quite possible that I might proceed into Volume II.

If you want glimpses of what this book is all about I suggest you look into this BBC video, it's how I came across it in the first place!

Understanding China through Comics

Thank you Jing Liu.

3.8/5

Jennifer says

Full disclosure. I received this volume for free through a Goodreads Giveaway in return for an honest review.

In short, *Understanding China through Comics* is a great introduction to Chinese history, especially for those like myself who are daunted by the sheer depth and breadth of Chinese history as well as anyone who generally finds it difficult to get excited about non-fiction. I'll probably scrounge up copies of the other volumes (especially since volume 2 includes the history of the Three Kingdoms, which many nerdy folk will have heard about from the historical novel if they're classy, and the video games, well, if they're into video games :).

Understanding China through Comics was written at a lower reading level than I anticipated, and I think that it would be suitable for advanced elementary and middle grade students, as well as high school students. Unlike many other comics/graphic novels that try to communicate non-fiction, *Understanding China through Comics* is, for the most part concise and easy to follow, as opposed to being bogged down by excessive amounts of text. I was quite impressed by the clarity and appeal of the graphics, especially the charts, tables and maps, which, while decorative enough to be visually appealing, are simple enough to convey information clearly. There are a few times in the book that the narrative becomes somewhat muddled when the author decides to include additional information about a particular personage or philosophy (e.g. Confucius; the various philosophies), which I think could've been fixed by having better headings/labeling. (It seemed to me that these sections would be the information in a history textbook that are in a colored box.) Overall, though, I applaud Jing Liu's work to make China's history a story that is both appealing and

accessible.

P.S. By necessity and design, *Understanding China through Comics* is a stripped down version of Chinese history, but I don't think that that should be held against the book. This series of books can probably provide readers with a general working knowledge of Chinese history, and if readers are inclined, which they may be after reading these books, they can explore more comprehensive texts about China.

Keshia says

I really enjoyed reading about the history of china in a comic setting. Obviously it couldn't encompass everything but I think this is a really neat idea for such an expansive history. There were a couple of times that I was like "oh, I didn't know that" which was really cool. I am excited to read the next volumes.

There were a few grammatical errors but nothing incredibly noticeable and I think I would have preferred a little bit of color to the comic because sometimes the black and white was a little boring. The art itself was very good though. I really enjoyed this and I think my oldest son will also enjoy this book as well.

AP says

Great idea to compress 5,000 years of Chinese history into 3 volumes of comic books. The opening lines to this book are awesome.

I enjoyed reading volume 1. Volumes 2 and 3 haven't been published yet. I think that this is a self-published book, which is nicely produced with high quality printing.

The art is very clean and communicates the ideas very capably. I liked the e-book so much that I purchased a paper copy to leave around the house for the kids to discover. While I agree with the broad strokes painted by the comic, I disagree with some of the details, e.g., some of the dates of the dynasties. Rarely does one dynasty end, and then in the same year the next dynasty starts. In addition, the author includes the Sui dynasty as a major dynasty, but most sinologists would not consider it as a major one.

So for kids and/or westerners without much knowledge of China, this book works as a fun, sufficient, and easily digestible introduction. My 8 yr-old has asked me for volumes 2 and 3.

Blue says

So Chinese history is really really confusing, perhaps because it is rather long with many many many dynasties and emperors. I finished Volume 1, and take home message is that.

I really enjoyed the infographics in the book, the bar graphs and such, though the subject matter was rather grizzly (how much of the population was killed during each power change? maybe you don't want to know, but if you do, the graphs are very helpful.) It certainly explains how while many empires crumbled, the Chinese survived as an identity and a power. I also like the "in" on some Chinese concepts, or codes, that Liu explains throughout the book.

The art is crisp and informative, the panels actually move, when not in actual physical space, in information space.

Recommended for those who want to know something about China and Chinese history, but have no idea where to begin, and those who like strange-seeming life and government philosophies.

Elmira says

I am very grateful to have received a copy of "Understanding China through Comics" Vol. 1 for free as a first-reads winner.

The book was an excellent introduction to Chinese History for all ages. After I read it, I gave it to my 10-year old son to read, and I'm sure he'll be as fascinated by it as I was!

I am probably representative of the average middle aged American in having essentially no knowledge of Chinese History. This book was a perfect introduction for me and formed a framework of events in my mind, so that as I dig deeper into learning about Chinese history in the future, I can place the detailed information in the larger picture of history.

I am glad to see that an overview of Chinese History is now being taught in 6th grade in California. This graphic novel would be a fabulous compliment to the standard textbook to enhance classroom learning for 6th graders. I would highly recommend it as a gift to incoming 6th graders or your child's 6th grade history teacher!

Helen says

This was extremely similar to the other Jing Liu book I read - "Foundations of Chinese Civilization: The Yellow Emperor to the Han Dynasty (2697 BCE - 220 CE)" - the present volume covers the same time period. Still it is a fun read, and manages to convey in a simplified, entertaining, and easy-to-understand format, a great deal of information about more than two millennia of Chinese history.

The explanation of the dynastic cycle is interesting - and something to keep in mind when thinking about dynastic changeovers, or the collapse of states or complex systems anywhere. A key factor is income inequality; other problems could be natural disasters and famines - factors that may push populations that had expanded when times were good, to the brink and cause a loss of faith in leadership, and result in conflict, and eventually dynastic change. Even today, the Chinese leadership seems obsessed with stability; this is not too surprising considering that instability and disorder regularly led to challenges to the ruling class etc in the past.

China is of course an extraordinary civilization - about 5,000 years of continuous development, a span of time that can't be matched anywhere else, currently zooming to the number one position globally in economic might, a position that it has traditionally held during the past 2,000 years.

Ancient Chinese art - such as bronzes, and statuary - is both incredibly beautiful and priceless, and the tradition of producing and valuing fine art has continued down through the millennia. A stroll through the

halls of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NY to see showcases filled with wonderful Chinese ceramics or scrolls from various eras - or carved lacquer ware and porcelain, and so much more - objects that always leave the museum-goer greatly impressed with the level of skill and restrained taste displayed by the artists who made these objects.

Here are some quotes from the book:

"For a large part of the last 2,000 years, China has been the most populated country and largest economy in the world."

"In 1259, a Chinese soldier from a little town fired at a Mongol enemy, not knowing his action would lead to the splitting of the Mongol Empire, the saving of Europe from total conquest, and change in the history of several continents."

"Decentralized systems, such as feudal society, disappeared in China 1,500 years earlier than Europe."

"In 8 AD, [Wang Mang] ...took the throne and established the Xin Dynasty. Wang Mang launched sweeping reforms to save the economy. Land privatization is the root of the rich-poor gap and social turmoil. Take land from the large landowners..and assign it to the poor. Ban land sales!"

After Wang Mang's death, 14 years of fighting among rebel groups led to the re-establishment of the Han Dynasty in 37 AD, known as the Eastern Han, led by Liu Xiu. "As a result of the education expansion, major traditional Chinese art forms were formally established: Literature, painting, antique collection, seal carving, calligraphy."

"After over 400 years of relative unification under the Qin and Han, China would be divided for nearly 400 years. Political unity disappeared and China's heartland was lost to northern nomads. Chinese civilization was to be put to a great test."

The story, therefore, continues in the next two volumes of this cartoon/graphic novel format history of China... I am looking forward to reading the next two volumes of Mr. Liu's work!

Bill says

It was okay. I definitely learned some things. IMHO too much of it was also just speeding through like a hundred names, the Western equivalent of Landowner Whatever and Prince Whoever then took over the County from Earl Whositz but the great great grandson got revenge though when he took it back 50 years later for one month before his twin sister axed him in the back etc etc.

Despite this, still might read Volume 2.
