

Deng persuade his allies, senior Stalinists, to allow him to unleash economic reform energies in China as never before seen in a Leninist party dictatorship? Vogel isn't interested. His descriptions of inner-party struggles in the two decisive periods, 1977–1981 and 1989–1992, have none of the rich, new knowledge of Vogel's great research on inner-party struggles from 1981–1989.

In sum, Deng's economic boldness in 1992 changed China and the world, just as Vogel's wonderful book argues. But Vogel misleads readers by not clarifying how much Stalinism and chauvinism were institutionalized in the CCP by Deng's policy choices and allies. Ignoring all this reality, Vogel's vision of China and its future seem overly optimistic. Deng's legacy to the Chinese people and the world may not be as glorious as Vogel suggests, unless Vogel is right that China will do best when a politically disengaged Chinese people happily welcome super-patriotic Stalinists dominating politics. That perception is not a view shared in China by Han victims of land theft, Han workers virtually enslaved in mines, Han people who rage at corruption and polarization, Uighurs, Tibetans, Christians, spiritualists, political reformers, and promoters of human dignity. ■

NOTES

1. Yang Jisheng, *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958–1962* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

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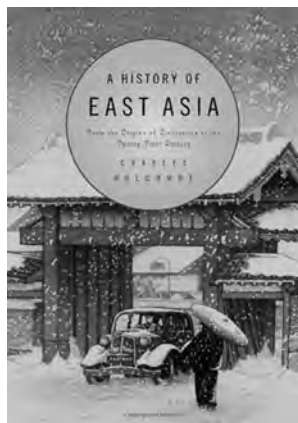
A History of East Asia From the Origins of Civilization to the Twenty-first Century

BY CHARLES HOLCOMBE

NEW YORK: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2011

456 PAGES, ISBN 978-0-521-51595-5, HARDBACK; ISBN 978-0-521-73164-5 PAPER

Reviewed by Keith N. Knapp



Charles Holcombe has given instructors of East Asian history courses and world history teachers a welcome gift: his book, *A History of East Asia*. This volume is packed with both information and insights. The author provides interesting facts that will spice up lectures and illuminating statistics that will give students a vivid sense of East Asia's size and progress in relation to the rest of the world. He is particularly adept at showing how interactions between China, Japan, and Korea shaped the East Asian world. The book's primary

limitation is that it is much weaker in describing East Asia's ties with other civilizations.

One of the book's overall aims is to provide an integrated view of East Asian history. On this score, Holcombe admirably succeeds. In his *The*

Genesis of East Asia: 221 B.C.–A.D. 907 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), Holcombe persuasively demonstrates that, during China's early imperial period, East Asia became a coherent region by means of the adoption of the Chinese written script, Chinese government institutions, Confucianism, and Chinese-style Buddhism. In this book, the author uses these insights to create a history of the entire East Asian world from antiquity to the present. The results are stunning.

With the exception of the second chapter, which solely discusses the history of China during its formative period from 1045 BCE to 280 CE, each chapter substantially discusses the history, society, and culture of China, Korea, and Japan. Holcombe particularly highlights the historical interactions between these three countries. He tells us that, during the Tang dynasty (618–907), the Korean kingdom of Silla (?–935) dominated maritime trade in Northeast Asia and that a number of Tang cities had “Sillan wards” or “Sillan villages.” He notes that “Some eighty-eight Sillans are known to have passed the civil service examinations in China during roughly the last century of the Tang dynasty. Several of them served in Tang government offices before returning to Korea, where they became voices for the promotion of Confucian ideals” (113). It is through such concrete information that Holcombe demonstrates how East Asia was interconnected, allowing cultural forms to pass from one country to another.

Instructors will love this book because Holcombe fills the text with a wealth of information and statistics. He assiduously provides beginning dates for phenomenon that we see as characteristic of that culture. For example, in China, the seasonal ancestral rites and worship of Confucius at Confucian temples that are often viewed as hallmarks of Chinese culture only reached their mature form in the Tang dynasty (98). The quintessential Japanese food sushi first appeared in nineteenth-century Tokyo, while the national sport *judo* was only invented at the end of the nineteenth century (8–9). He is particularly good at using statistics to give the reader perspective on the affluence and size of East Asia in relation to the rest of the world. He notes that, in the early 500s, Nanjing was probably the largest city in the world, with a population of 1.4 million (64). The pre-modern porcelain workshops in the Chinese city of Jingdezhen probably employed close to 70,000 workers, making this city the largest industrial complex in the world. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, China exported to Europe alone more than a hundred million pieces of porcelain (192). In the early eighteenth century, Europe's largest city, Paris, had more than half a million people, whereas Edo (Tokyo) had more than a million (185). By the eighteenth century, the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) ruled perhaps as much as 40 percent of the world's population (171). These statistics are a good tonic to Western ethnocentrism and remind us that East Asia's postwar resurgence is not an anomaly but rather a return to a normal state of world affairs. Holcombe also uses statistics to give his reader a concrete look at the sizes and structures of East Asian societies. For instance, he reminds us that, in the tenth century, Japan probably had six million people, but only 20,000 people were fully literate, and the imperial academy only had 400 students (118). He illustrates the growing significance of the Chinese civil service examinations through numbers. In the Tang dynasty, about thirty men per year obtained the coveted *Jinshi* (Presented Scholar). By the Southern Song (1127–1279), four to five hundred did so. By the Ming-Qing (1368–1911) period, at any given time, a million men were engaged in preparing for or taking the examinations, and degree-holders accounted for 1 to 2 percent of the population (131–132). Useful statistics like these make his prose sharp and informative; students are not fed vague pronouncements that merely give them a hazy idea about these societies.

Despite having to paint East Asia in broad strokes to cover all of its history in one volume, Holcombe still finds time to enliven the text by

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talking about representative individuals. To illustrate how the diverse cultural aspects of the Six Dynasties period (220–589) were building a foundation of cultural unity in the Tang, he tells of a mid-sixth-century man named Lu Fahe, a southern aborigine who began his career as a Buddhist monk. Despite being a Buddhist, he was well-practiced in the Daoist arts of prognostication, healing, and geomancy. Later on, he helped loyalist forces put down a rebellion and served as an official for a southern Chinese dynasty and then a northern “barbarian” dynasty. Lu was an embodiment of a medieval Chinese man who easily crossed boundaries, whether they were political, religious, or ethnic. To indicate how in medieval Japan imperial legitimacy took a backseat to personal ambition, the author discusses the life of the warlord Ashikaga Takauji (1305–1358), the founder of the Muromachi shogunate (1333–1573). Despite being a samurai who should cherish loyalty to his lord more than his own life, Ashikaga built his career on betrayal. He rebelled against the Kamakura shogunate (1185–1333) to fight for the rebellious Emperor Go-Daigo. When Go-Daigo attempted to monopolize power, Ashikaga rebelled, expelled him from Kyoto, and appointed his own emperor. Ashikaga killed his own brother when he became a threat to the shogun’s power (154–155). Using the details of these individuals’ lives to illustrate larger historical trends makes the text come alive with interesting and real characters.

Of course, no matter how good the text is, in covering such a vast expanse of space and time, there are sure to be omissions. One of the text’s most serious flaws is that the Silk Roads is given short shrift. Perhaps this happens because the focus of this book is on interactions between the countries of East Asia rather than East Asia’s relations with other regions. Nevertheless, China, Japan, and Korea were all affected by the Silk Roads trade, both materially and culturally. Although Holcombe tells us about the many Koreans living in the Tang dynasty, he does not mention that there were many other foreigners living there, such as Uighurs, Sogdians, and Persians. Consequently, we do not get much sense of premodern East Asia’s connections with the larger world. In the same vein, Holcombe could have said much more about the Mongolian Empire, which for the first time connected East Asia with West Asia under the same government. This is the perfect opportunity to talk about connections between the East and the West, but Holcombe largely confines his comments to the history

of the Mongol Yuan dynasty, thereby adhering to the book’s East Asian focus. One cannot help but feel that he truly missed an opportunity here to connect the history of East Asia with that of Eurasia as a whole.

Another important omission was any mention of Daoism as an organized religion. The three important religions of China were Confucianism, Buddhism, and organized Daoism. All three had a significant impact on the histories of Japan and Korea. Thus, it is a shame that Holcombe only discusses philosophical Daoism.

A problem that probably has more to do with Cambridge University Press rather than the author is the fact that a general history such as this should be more lavishly illustrated with maps and photographs. Although the choice of illustrations is good, there are far too few of them. How can a text for beginning students mention the Oracle Bones but not have a photograph of them? One would think there would be a chart of the written scripts of East Asia. Although the maps are of good quality, they could be much more detailed. For example, the text depicts the Chinese capture of Tashkent, the Battle of Talas, and the Tibetan cities of Lhasa and Yarlung; nevertheless, the relevant map on page 105 shows none of these places. The reader is not provided with a detailed map of either premodern Korea or Japan, so one does not obtain a clear mental image of them—they are just small places with a few cities on a big map of East Asia.

Overall, though, instructors will feel a profound sense of gratitude to Holcombe because he has given them a comprehensive history of the East Asian region that is not only readable and informative, but which also excels in showing what made this a culturally cohesive area. ■

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