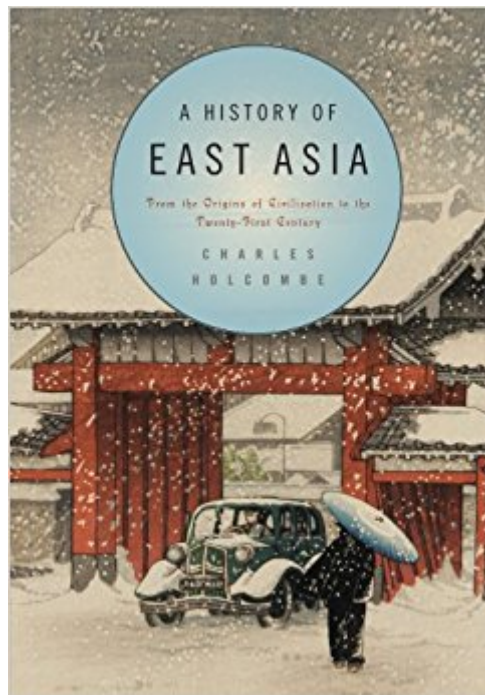




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# A History Of East Asia: From The Origins Of Civilization To The Twenty-First Century



## Synopsis

Charles Holcombe begins his extraordinarily ambitious book by asking the question "What is East Asia?" In the modern age, many of the features that made the region - now defined as including China, Japan, and Korea - distinct have been submerged by the effects of revolution, politics, or globalization. Yet, as an ancient civilization, the region had both an historical and cultural coherence. It shared, for example, a Confucian heritage, some common approaches to Buddhism, a writing system that is deeply imbued with ideas and meaning, and many political and institutional traditions. This shared past and the interconnections among three distinct, yet related societies are at the heart of this book, which traces the story of East Asia from the dawn of history to the early twenty-first century. Charles Holcombe is an experienced and sure-footed guide who encapsulates, in a fast-moving and colorful narrative, the vicissitudes and glories of one of the greatest civilizations on earth.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"For general readers and interested students alike, this book will be a delight. Holcombe has a good eye and ear for what is historically important, and his coherent narrative thread connects the chapters of his book like the beads of a necklace" - David Curtis Wright, Department of History, University of Calgary

Holcombe's book is going to be a very important text for undergraduates and general readers looking for a fresh approach to East Asian history. He takes the reader through all the requisite periods and places, yet does so in ways which bring out new insights and connections. Holcombe engages with important themes in current scholarship and shows how they are really

relevant to better understanding the complex and diverse history of this critical region. His approach to synchronous developments across China, Korea and Japan, and the ways in which the historical narratives of these countries interact with each other, make this a most useful and enlightening book." - Ken Hammond, Professor of East Asian History, New Mexico State University

"Treading a line between the emerging field of transnational history and a more traditional regional history, Holcombe has written a valuable and impressive guide to the histories of East Asia. The historical and regional scope, reaching from the ancient past to the ultra-modern present, is unprecedented in a volume of this size. Students of East Asia and of international history will find this book essential reading." - Chris Goto-Jones, Professor and Director of the Modern East Asia Research Centre, Leiden University

Charles Holcombe begins his extraordinarily ambitious book by asking the question "What is East Asia?" In the modern age, many of the features that made the region - now defined as including China, Japan, and Korea - distinct have been submerged by the effects of revolution, politics, or globalization. Yet, as an ancient civilization, the region had both an historical and cultural coherence. This shared past and the interconnections among three distinct, yet related societies are at the heart of this book, which traces the story of East Asia from the dawn of history to the early twenty-first century.

Charles Holcombe's *A History of East Asia* is a great book. I will admit that when I read the opening chapter (from a sample copy), I almost decided against purchasing the book. Holcombe states that World War II began in 1937. For those familiar with this event, the date conflicts with virtually every Western history book. Thus, the last thing I wanted to do was buy a history book containing erroneous information. But after speaking with a few Chinese and Korean acquaintances, I was informed that the date is correct from the perspective of East Asian history. What would progress into a world war (World War II) involved Asia before it significantly involved Europe or the U.S. In other words, the book is written from the East Asian perspective, yet through a Westerner's vantage point. In any case, I'm very glad I purchased the book. It is one of the best history books I've read. The book is well-written. The major events are written in an entertaining style, and the cultural discussions were both informative and interesting. I especially liked the fact that a decent portion of the book was devoted to pre-modern times; most history books on Asia by Western authors focus too much attention on Asia after contact with the West. The book also discusses some of the ancient innovations and early political developments in

China (and the East Asian region), and gives some insight (albeit, brief) into why China lagged behind the West after becoming the most advanced empire. Of course, like most history books that tackle a large geographic region over a considerable timespan, some of the details are lost. Nonetheless, I haven't come across many history books that managed to hold my attention from beginning to end like this book. It's important to mention that the book is about East Asia, which the author defines as China, Korea, and Japan. This seems to be the common understanding of East Asia (sometimes called North East Asia) in the West "distinguished from Southeast Asia, South Asia, or Northern Asia. In addition, Holcombe limits East Asia to these three nations because these nations are defined by a common underlying historical culture; Korea and Japan adapted much of their cultural values, attitudes, customs, and early institutions from China. While China certainly influenced other Asian societies, such as Vietnam and Southeast Asia generally, these other nations are not the focus of this book. In summary, if you are interested in the history of East Asia, this is a good introduction. I highly recommend this book.

For quite some time, I have been looking for a History of Asia that compares to the History of Western Civilization that I studied in college. This book defines 'East Asia' as China, the Korean peninsula, and Japan. It presents separate narratives for these three 'countries', as they coalesced. At the end of each Chapter is a list of links to more detailed sources. For someone wanting an overview, or for scholars wanting a 'base' for their studies, this is the book to read.

The book is informative, but not so dense that a newcomer to the subject is overwhelmed. After years of studying European, North African and Middle Eastern history I thought it would be good to get an understanding of East Asia; this book is easily the best for accomplishing that goal. It is surprisingly accessible. For those buying the Kindle Edition, though Kindles rarely display maps well, this book was less challenging than most. If the user switches the Kindle display sideways, the maps are actually quite legible.

This is great to understand these countries. Their philosophy, culture, and relationship are tangled with each other. This book tells three countries' histories paralleled in the each periods, which was very helpful. And this author may understand the essential philosophies, confucianism and buddism, very well. I love to recommend this book to anyone who wants to know the past and the present of these countries!

History books have a lot of information and are sometimes hard to read. This one is pretty clear and tells you the story in a very straight forward way. I took a class and this was my textbook. I still have it and read it once in a while.

Comprehensive cultural history to provide greater understanding of not only what divides nations but what also unites them.

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