

of female nudity on postcards constructed the image of Formosa as a timeless native island, created the imaginary of Taiwanese aborigines as the Other and emphasized Japan's status as a civilized colonizer.

The opening paper of Part III is Ayumi Mitsunari's study on "Marriage and Conversion as a National Issue: The Discourses over Lina Joy's Litigation in Contemporary Malaysia". Mitsunari undertakes a critical analysis of the dichotomous discourses concerning the litigation of a Malay woman born to Malay Muslim parents, who was baptized and applied to have her conversion registered so that she could marry a Christian man. Lina Joy's personal case attracted much attention both in Malaysia and abroad. A coalition composed of non-Muslim organizations, human rights lawyers and various women's bodies supported Lina Joy's plea on constitutional grounds and engendered discourses centring on the freedom of religion. Instead, Muslim NGOs criticized what they perceived as attempts to limit the status of Islam in the Constitution and the judicial system of Malaysia. Chikara Uchida's paper, "I Am Not a Social Historian: The Use of the Term 'Social History' in Postwar Japan", first introduces the concept of social history as it was construed by the French Annales School. It then examines how this concept was conceived by the community of historians in Japan. Finally, it demonstrates how scholars combined the two definitions to create a global history of historiography.

This volume ends with a paper by Isabelle Tracol-Huynh on "Prostitutes, Brothels and the Red Light District: The Management of Prostitution in the City of Hanoi from the 1870s to the 1950s". Starting from the premise that the management of prostitution in Hanoi is at the crossroads between global and local history, the author analyses the local adaptations of the French regulatory system by using colonial archives such as police and medical reports as well as juridical texts. To conclude, the distinctive merit of this variegated collection of papers is that each essay examines historical processes in terms of shifts and nodes across space and time from a different disciplinary perspective. In so doing, the authors have sought to engage in a reciprocal dialogue that aims to explore new pathways in the study of historical phenomena.

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*A History of East Asia: from the Origins of Civilization to the Twenty-First Century.* By Charles Holcombe.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. 456. ISBN 10: 052173164X; ISBN 13: 978-0521731645.

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This is a solid and ambitious historical guide to a currently important region of the world, East Asia. Inevitably, Charles Holcombe begins his book by asking the question "What is East Asia?", and investigates the ways the peoples and civilizations living here have identified themselves, introducing concepts such as the Chinese *Zhongguo* 中國 (Central Country, or Middle Kingdom) and *Huaxia* 華夏 (consciousness of being Chinese). In the modern age, many of the distinctive features that made the region – now defined as including China, Japan, and Korea – have been submerged by the effects of revolution, politics (often, like Communism, brought in from elsewhere), or globalization. Yet, as the site of ancient civilizations, the region had both an historical and cultural coherence. It shared 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 twenty-first century in twelve substantial chapters.

Reviewers have complimented Holcombe on having “a good eye and ear for what is historically important”, for the coherence of his narrative text, and yet the freshness of his selection, bringing out new insights and connections. I like the author’s attempt at not just names-dropping, but also introducing a key idea or turn-of-phrase from literary giants (see his section on Mencius, Confucius et al.). It is a pity that he could not do the same for Li Po/Li Bai 李白 on page 95, whose poem “Quiet Night Thought” is a classic text in Chinese schools today. Just one verse would give readers an idea of the poetic sentiment involved. I also like the way the author juxtaposes the ritual with the real, which adds colour to the text without mocking Eastern ancient ritual prescription. Thus, for example, he refers to the Japanese monarchy as the chrysanthemum throne, and explains how independence after the Second World War was reported to the sun goddess, Amaterasu, from which the Japanese monarchy claimed mythical yet real descent. Holcombe’s writing is extremely clear and well paced, and more introductory and less esoteric than writers like Jurgis Elisonas, who has contributed key chapters to the *Cambridge History of Japan*.

By writing the book as a trans-national history, constantly comparing and contrasting the individual states’ destinies, Holcombe is able to supersede a more traditional regional history. This is one of the positive attributes immediately commented upon by readers: they like the sectional divisions and idea of comparing Korean, Japanese and Chinese development as well as the comparison to Western similarities and differences. Many university professors (in North America particularly) concur that this book will constitute “essential reading” for students of East Asia and of international history. To judge from Amazon reviews, many East Asians also acclaim the book, and thus the book seems already to enjoy an international readership.

The author is strongest on political and social developments. I missed the odd paragraph on environmental history (such as the association of the emperors with the black-headed cranes, or the magnificent artwork depicting the imperial hunting parties on tiny Manchurian horses, a throwback to dynastic origins), the challenges of huge infrastructural projects like the new railway to Lhasa, but also the smog issue in the cities on the eastern seaboard exacerbated by excessive industrialization. There is currently a very successful BBC television series “Wild China”, which draws attention to these issues and which points to the work ahead for the Chinese authorities.

In one or two places I felt Holcombe did well to side-step issues that rival texts get drawn into and which are historically fallacious – Michael Seth’s ascription of the import of gimchi pepper from the New World to the eighteenth century rather than the Imjin War of 1592–1598 is here a case in point. By not specifying any particular date, but nevertheless indicating its arrival (p. 177) Holcombe avoids controversy.

At one point, I felt Holcombe a bit naive regarding world civilizations thinking themselves the centre of the world. This, the “omphalos syndrome”, is a well-known universal, which applies to Europe as much as Asia, as can be seen from the large stone placed at Delphi representing the ancient Greek navel of the world, or from conventions influencing medieval European cartography, such as placing Jerusalem, the site of Christ’s Passion, in the centre of the map.

There is a good selection of images, and they are both well situated within the text and of high reproductive quality. The author includes a pronunciation guide (pp. xiii–xv), but I was wondering whether it would not be wise to follow proper names by their East Asian characters, both to familiarize Western audiences with these characters, and to minimize the chance of misunderstanding. In some places, as in Figure 5.2, two alternative spellings for people’s names are provided: Xia Gui, Hsia Kuei. A decision between the two has to be made, and Chinese characters might have been provided alongside. This is something that some historians already do. Furthermore, one of the authors referred to, Nicòla di Cosmo, might benefit from accenting his name, as is done in Italian, so that readers do not think he is a woman.

One might highlight the skew towards modern history (the last four chapters deal with events post-dating 1900), and I find the cover illustration a rather poor choice: something more classically East Asian would be more appealing (the catalogue of the recent China exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, which ended on January 14, 2014, would provide a host of samples). One reviewer has highlighted the book's superficiality and lack of depth. I would not readily concur here: for a Western audience, at least, there is everything to be learned here. Perhaps the reviewer is confusing superficiality with the strictures imposed by writing about four millennia within 350 pages.

While the author grounds a lot of his research and guides students towards further reading in relation to a corpus of solid American university texts on East Asia, more could be made of what East Asians themselves write on their history. I was surprised too that top UK historians like Frances Wood, Head of Chinese Collections at the British Library, were omitted from the Bibliography.

A new edition is in the pipeline on the basis that a lot has happened in East Asia since this one of 2010/11: the Chinese Olympics, the nuclear devastation in Japan, the new regime in North Korea following the death of Kim Jong-il in December 2011, and its recent victims etc. There are certain things I would add: a map with the names of the current Chinese provinces; a different cover, as already mentioned; one or two turns of phrase – for example, I am not sure what “sincere morality” is (p. 56), does Holcombe mean a less prescriptive morality? Terms like Japan's “Inland Sea” (内海) might be elucidated for readers. Finally, one of the largest developments in the literature over the last fifteen years has been in Pacific Rim history (journals, conferences, an entire Ashgate book series). I was surprised that this term does not even figure in the Index: those historians who champion that history would include Japan and even China as Pacific Rim, though I have complained previously that swathes of Chinese history are marked by a turning-away from sea-borne enterprise rather than an engagement with it (see my review “The Pacific World, 1500–1900”, in the official journal of the FEEGI forum *Itinerario* 30:1 (March 2006), pp. 83–86)!

All things considered, I would, strongly recommend this book. It has more focus, depth and illustrations than Colin Mason's *A Short History of Asia*, Palgrave Macmillan 2014, and I will use it in class to replace worthwhile but older text books like Marius B. Jansen's *Japan and Its World: Two Centuries of Change*, 1980.

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*Luminous Bliss: A Religious History of Pure Land Literature in Tibet.* By Georgios T. Halkias.

Pure Land Buddhist Studies Series, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013. Pp. 335. ISBN 10: 0824835905; ISBN 13: 978-0824835903.

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Georgios Halkias' *Luminous Bliss* represents an admirable and critical piece of scholarship, which has brought a long-awaited attention to the textual and ritual traditions of Pure Land Buddhism in Tibet. It is an essential read not only for those specializing in Pure Land Buddhism or Tibetan Buddhism, but also for those interested in the broader themes of Mahāyāna and tantric traditions of South, Central, and Inner Asia. In his preliminary remarks in “Buddhisms and Other Conventions,” Halkias articulates his hesitation in employing the term “Pure Land Buddhism” with reference to Tibet due to the term's common association with the East Asian Mahāyāna development of a devotion to Amitābha and his Sukhāvātī. Nevertheless, he settles on the term “Tibetan Pure Land Buddhism” as a generic term for reasons of comparison with Pure Land developments in South and East Asia and to differentiate Amitābha-centered trends from those associated with other deities. Halkias does not want the reader to assume that this term and his analysis of the given material