

## East Asia in the World

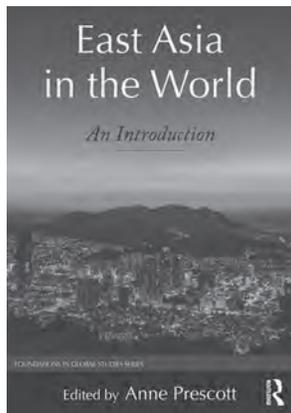
### An Introduction

ANNE PRESCOTT, ED.

NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE, 2015

292 PAGES, ISBN: 978-0765643223, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by Stephanie Lee Rizas



**E**ast Asia in the World: An Introduction, edited by Anne Prescott, should be in every history teacher's classroom. This slim text somehow manages to cover essential elements of Asian history, culture, economics, and politics, and provides a plethora of extension resources that correlate to each chapter. The text itself is high-level, and some chapters and sections may not be useful in the classroom without modifications, but as a teacher resource, this text is unmatched. As with other texts in the *Foundations in Global Studies* series from M. E. Sharpe, the book is organized

into two parts: a comprehensive overview and a series case studies. The text begins with a primer on the regional association of East Asian countries, some of the essential elements of East Asian culture and history that are shared across borders (Confucianism, the use of Chinese characters, etc.), and an explanation of the impact of globalization on not only East Asian countries but on the relationship between the region and the rest of the world. This text is an excellent resource for teachers and students at the secondary level who are interested in taking a deeper dive into the nuances of regional history that are often forgotten in survey world history textbooks.

When teaching my East Asian history course, most of my high school students are seniors and have already completed a year of modern world history or AP World History. As a result, I am lucky to have students with some background knowledge of the region. However, whatever prowess they claim to have in understanding East Asian history is often lost when misunderstandings of East Asia or stereotypes about East Asian people begin to emerge during our discussions of Japan, China, and Korea. In chapter 7, titled "Debunking the Myths," Anne Prescott presents and unpacks a series of myths about East Asians. While addressing these stereotypes head-on might feel uncomfortable at first, having an open conversation with students helps create a safe space in which readers can begin to consider their own beliefs about the region more seriously. Prescott straightforwardly dispels myths regarding gender, martial arts, food, history, and economic innovation. My students had many "aha moments" when discussing this brief but meaningful section—many began to realize that they had interpreted their own stereotypes as "cultural norms" about East Asians and that they had been overgeneralizing an entire population. Prescott's direct style of writing creates a chapter that is so readable it could be used in the secondary classroom without modification; students might be able to not only understand East Asia with a more refined and deeper cultural appreciation but also might understand their own beliefs about other Americans in a more meaningful way. Prescott acknowledges this possibility and points out that the reader is experiencing "unprecedented access to deeper and more nuanced understandings, allowing one to separate the strands of truths, half-truths, and unfounded suppositions" (116), thanks to globalization and the sheer access we have to other cultures and countries.

Stereotypes about how East Asian philosophy and religion affect the daily lives of people living in the region are dispelled further in chapter 12, "Society and Culture: Confucianism in East Asia Today." Jeffrey Richey delineates the philosophy into "state Confucianism, cultural Confucianism, and popular Confucianism," and points out how diversified its adoption has become in all three of these categories; students considering this chapter would do well to contemplate what the staying power of Confucianism indicates for the future of East Asia. Students will most likely be most influenced by the confluence of Confucian values and education in East Asia. Paired with "Debunking the Myths," this chapter would be useful in exploring how stereotypes are perpetuated, as well as the root of the cultural similarities and differences between American and East Asian educational systems; one of students' most common misunderstandings about East Asian culture is that everyone is devoted to education and fits the stereotypical "tiger mom" mentality toward persevering through academia. Both Richey and Prescott address this stereotype. Richey defines the Confucian foundation that exists underneath the East Asian cultural value in education, while Prescott points out that individuals and family dynamics in the modern era have often moved in different directions that might conflict with the Confucian expectations for education associated with the region.

No stereotype persists in my classroom more than that which my students possess about North Korea and its vicious regime. Thanks to popular comedy films such as *Team America* and *The Interview*, students often understand the regime to be laughably authoritarian and bizarre; the reality of the nuclear threat posed by the Kim dynasty and the subhuman conditions experienced by citizens of North Korea are essentially lost. In chapter 13, "The Korean Peninsula: Global Dimensions," Jacques Fuqua discusses the tumultuous history of the Korean peninsula and reveals the threatening and seemingly unstoppable policies taken up by Kim Jong-un of late. He points out that "the North Korean regime has come to represent the Gordian knot of geopolitics. For decades, experts have predicted its imminent demise, only to be proven wrong time and again" (200). Selections from this intense chapter could be used in the classroom to help ground students in the reality of the difficulties facing North Korea's enemies, allies, and neighbors in finding a path forward that maintains peace in the region. The chapter also points to further resources on the Six Party Talks (198), a great lead-in to a student simulation in which they create their own agreements to negotiate disarmament in North Korea and research the current interests of the Six Party Talks.

For teachers of US history or world history, several of the case studies build strong parallels through which students might relate the American cultural experience to that of the Japanese or Chinese. In "Reading 'Kimigayo,'" Junko Oba leads the reader through an analysis of the Act on National Flag and Anthem of 1999 in which Japan made the public display of its national flag and anthem legally acceptable after years of controversy following the militarist-dominated regime of the Second World War. This analysis points out the context of "national anthems" as they reflect the "process of modern nation-state building" (206) and the unique "Japaneseness" of the Kimigayo anthem in that the lyrics reflect *waka* short-form poetry, as well as a collaboration between the modern compositions of a German bandmaster and the "traditional" Japanese court musicians (208). Students examining this history could draw parallels between the controversy and popularization of the Kimigayo anthem with their own understanding of expressions of patriotism in America, such as reading the Pledge of Allegiance in schools or singing the national anthem before sporting events. I used this chapter to further support an anecdote from my own travels in Japan—one of our fellow tour mates was keen on presenting an American flag to each and every tour guide as we explored

various cities. While Japanese culture dictates the appropriateness of a thank you gift, the taboo nature of presenting a nationalistic symbol such as the American flag was often uncomfortable.

Another useful case study pairing would be chapter 15, "Globalization and Deindustrialization in China's (Former) Porcelain Capital," along with chapter 17, "China's One Child Policy and Urban Daughters." Both chapters provide many-layered opportunities for teachers and students to delve into China's economic systems, its impact on the Chinese worker, and its impact on gender norms. Students will discover parallels between the changing role of the Chinese manufacturing industry in chapter 15 while examining the evolving role of women in chapter 17, as the One Child Policy has created social and economic upheaval since the 1980s.

Furthermore, one case study delves into a topic that remains consistently popular among my students: cars. In chapter 9, "China's New Car Culture," students will love reading about the newly embraced car culture that has emerged among the new middle and upper classes of China, and will perhaps be jealous of the adorable and tricky accessories that can utilize bumper stickers to transform a Chevy into a Ferrari. This chapter is particularly readable, as the author takes readers through personal interviews and interactions with dedicated members of the car community in Kunming, only to conclude that as the roads become more crammed, biking starts to seem like a better alternative after all.

Pointedly missing from this text is mention of World War II. Perhaps because of the regional nature of this reader, Prescott left out an issue that continues to be highly controversial and problematic in relations between Japanese, Korean, and Chinese people. Major discrepancies exist between the ways in which China, Korea, and Japan remember the traumatizing years of the early to mid-twentieth century along the Pacific Rim; China and Korea both have serious concern with the whitewashed version of history they perceive Japanese schools to be promoting, while the Japanese feel that they've acknowledged their past and are moving forward peacefully. While seemingly in the past, these concerns over how history is memorialized keep these nations at an arm's length when it comes to political dealings. It is perhaps because of this continued controversy that the text would be even more useful if one chapter had been devoted to World War II's impact on East Asian peoples' often-strained relations and the ramifications for extraregional allies of these nations.

Each chapter in *East Asia in the World: An Introduction* is peppered with callout boxes in which Prescott offers additional readings and/or resources on the preceding topic. These extensions provide great opportunities for teachers to expand the topic or provide resources for students to research the case studies further. The text provides options for teachers to get creative with ways to weave the chapters in and out of a survey history course, or delve in deeper if the course allows. ■

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