

## A History of East Asia

Charles Holcombe begins 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, Korea, and Vietnam – distinct have been submerged by the effects of revolution, politics, or globalization. Yet, as an ancient civilization, the region had both a historical and cultural coherence. This shared past is at the heart of this extraordinarily ambitious book, which traces the story of East Asia from the dawn of history to the twenty-first century. The second edition has been imaginatively revised and expanded to include an added emphasis on cross-cultural interactions and connections, both within East Asia and beyond, new chapters on Vietnam, and new material on modern pop culture. The updated volume also features a Chinese character list, fourteen new illustrations, and seven new maps.

**Charles Holcombe** is professor of history at the University of Northern Iowa. His publications include *The Genesis of East Asia, 221 BC–AD 907* (2001) and *In the Shadow of the Han: Literati Thought and Society at the Start of the Southern Dynasties* (1994).

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-11873-7 — A History of East Asia  
2nd Edition  
Frontmatter  
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# A History of East Asia

## From the Origins of Civilization to the Twenty-First Century

CHARLES HOLCOMBE



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
4843/24, 2nd Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi – 110002, India  
79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107118737](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107118737)

First edition © Charles Holcombe 2011

Second edition © Charles Holcombe 2017

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First edition published 2011

Reprinted 2011 (twice)

Second edition published 2017

Printed in the United States of America by Sheridan Books, Inc.

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

Names: Holcombe, Charles, 1956- author.

Title: A history of East Asia : from the origins of civilization to the twenty-first century / Charles Holcombe.

Description: Second edition. | Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016025900 | ISBN 9781107118737 (Hardback) | ISBN 9781107544895 (Paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: East Asia—History. | East Asia—Civilization.

Classification: LCC DS511 .H65 2016 | DDC 950—dc23 LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016025900>

ISBN 978-1-107-11873-7 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-54489-5 Paperback

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## Contents

	<i>List of Illustrations</i>	<i>page xi</i>
	<i>List of Maps</i>	xiii
	<i>Pronunciation Guide</i>	xv
	<i>Timeline</i>	xix
	<i>Glossary</i>	xxi
	<b>Introduction: What Is East Asia?</b>	1
<b>1.</b>	<b>The Origins of Civilization in East Asia</b>	12
	“Out of Africa”: The First East Asians	12
	East Asian Languages and Writing Systems	15
	Bronze Age China	25
<b>2.</b>	<b>The Formative Era</b>	31
	The Age of the Classics	31
	<i>Zhou Dynasty China (1045–256 BCE)</i>	31
	<i>The Hundred Schools of Thought</i>	36
	Confucianism	36
	Daoism	40
	Legalism	42
	The Art of War	43
	First Empire	45
	“ <i>The Faults of Qin</i> ” (221–207 BCE)	45
	The Han Empire (202 BCE–220 CE)	49
	The Romance of the Three Kingdoms (220–280 CE)	56

<b>3.</b>	<b>The Age of Cosmopolitanism</b>	60
	China in Division	60
	<i>The Sixteen Kingdoms (North China, 304–439)</i>	60
	<i>The Southern Dynasties (South China, 317–589)</i>	63
	<i>Northern Wei (North China, 386–534)</i>	66
	<i>Cosmopolitan Elite International Culture</i>	71
	Buddhism Comes to East Asia	72
	<i>Indian Origins</i>	72
	<i>Buddhism's Spread to China</i>	75
	<i>Buddhism and the Birth of East Asia</i>	79
	The Emergence of Korean Kingdoms	81
	<i>Early Korea (ca. 2000 BCE–313 CE)</i>	81
	<i>Three Kingdoms Korea (313–668)</i>	84
	Yamato Japan (ca. 300–645)	88
<b>4.</b>	<b>The Creation of a Community: China, Korea, and Japan (Seventh–Tenth Centuries)</b>	95
	Chinese Imperial Restoration: The Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907) Dynasties	95
	<i>The Sui Reunification (589) and the Founding of the Tang</i>	95
	<i>The Consolidation of Tang Rule</i>	98
	<i>The Harmonization of Diversity</i>	100
	<i>Domesticating Chinese Buddhism</i>	104
	<i>Watershed: The Mid-Tang Crisis</i>	107
	<i>The “Transmission of the Way,” and Growing Commercialization</i>	110
	The Birth of Korea: Unified Silla (668–935)	114
	<i>Unification of the Korean Peninsula (668)</i>	114
	<i>Silla</i>	117
	Imperial Japan: Nara (710–784) and Early Heian (794–ca. Tenth Century [–1185])	120
	<i>The Taika Coup (645)</i>	120
	<i>Nara (710–784)</i>	122
	<i>Early Heian (794–ca. Tenth Century [–1185])</i>	126
<b>5.</b>	<b>Mature Independent Trajectories (Tenth–Sixteenth Centuries)</b>	132
	Late Imperial China: The Song (960–1279), Yuan (1271–1368), and Early Ming Dynasties (1368–ca. Sixteenth Century [–1644])	132
	<i>The Song Dynasty Situation</i>	132
	<i>Economic and Social Change</i>	135
	<i>Neo-Confucianism</i>	139
	<i>Mongol Tempest: Chinggis Khan (ca. 1162–1227)</i>	141
	<i>The Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368)</i>	145
	<i>The Early Ming (1368–ca. Sixteenth Century [–1644])</i>	147
	Confucian Korea: Koryŏ (918–1392) and Early Chosŏn (1392–ca. Sixteenth Century [–1910])	149

	<i>Koryō (918–1392)</i>	149
	<i>The Era of Mongol Domination (1270–1356)</i>	151
	<i>Early Chosōn (1392–ca. Sixteenth Century [–1910])</i>	152
	Warrior Japan: Late Heian ([794–] Tenth Century–1185), Kamakura (1185–1333), and Muromachi (1333–1568)	154
	<i>The Rise of the Warriors</i>	154
	<i>The Gempei War (1180–1185)</i>	157
	<i>The Kamakura Shogunate (1185–1333)</i>	159
	<i>Muromachi (1333–1568)</i>	161
<b>6.</b>	<b>Early Modern East Asia (Sixteenth–Eighteenth Centuries)</b>	167
	Late Ming ([1368–] Sixteenth Century–1644) and Qing (1644–Eighteenth Century [–1912]) Dynasty China	167
	<i>Late Ming Consumer Culture</i>	167
	<i>The Manchu, Qing, “Gunpowder Empire” (1644–Eighteenth Century [–1912])</i>	174
	The Hermit Kingdom: Late Chosōn Korea ([1392–] Sixteenth–Nineteenth Centuries [–1910])	183
	The Reunification of Japan (1568–1600) and the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603–1868)	187
	<i>Three Reunifiers</i>	187
	<i>The Tokugawa Shogunate (1603–1868)</i>	190
	<i>The World Turned Upside Down: Early Modern Economic Development</i>	195
<b>7.</b>	<b>Dai Viet (Vietnam before the Nineteenth Century)</b>	199
	The Origins of Civilization in Vietnam	199
	Chinese Imperial Frontier	202
	Dai Viet	206
	Champa	211
	Vietnam Reaches the Mekong	213
	The Last Dynasty	214
<b>8.</b>	<b>The Nineteenth-Century Encounter of Civilizations</b>	217
	Industrialization and the Rise of New Great Powers	217
	The Nineteenth-Century Impact on China	220
	<i>The Opium Wars</i>	221
	<i>Domestic Rebellions</i>	225
	<i>The Tongzhi Restoration (1862–1874)</i>	227
	<i>The Treaty Ports</i>	230
	<i>The Boxer Rebellion (1898–1900)</i>	232
	The Nineteenth-Century Opening of Korea	235
	The Meiji Restoration (1868–1912): Japan “Leaves Asia”	240
	<i>Commodore Perry and the Opening of Japan (1853–1854)</i>	241
	<i>The Meiji Restoration (1868)</i>	244

	<i>Meiji Modernization</i>	248
	The Meiji Constitution	249
	Industrialization	252
	The French Colonization of Vietnam	255
<b>9.</b>	<b>The Age of Westernization (1900–1929)</b>	259
	Empire’s End: Republican Revolution in China	259
	<i>The 1911 Revolution</i>	262
	<i>The May Fourth Movement: Science and Democracy</i>	264
	<i>The Warlord Era, 1916–1928</i>	270
	Korea under Japanese Rule, 1905–1945	273
	Japan: Taishō Democracy	278
	“ <i>Our Ancestors the Gauls</i> ”: French Colonial Indochina	283
<b>10.</b>	<b>The Dark Valley (1930–1945)</b>	288
	The Rise of Japanese Ultrationalism	288
	Manchukuo	291
	Nationalist China	295
	The Rise of Mao Zedong	297
	World War II in China	299
	World War II in the Pacific	304
<b>11.</b>	<b>Japan since 1945</b>	311
	The Postwar Allied Occupation	311
	Economic Recovery and the “Developmental State”	317
	Trade Wars, and the End of the Japanese Miracle	321
	Japan and Globalization	323
<b>12.</b>	<b>Korea since 1945</b>	330
	The Korean War	330
	North Korea	335
	South Korea: Syngman Rhee and the First Republic (1948–1960)	338
	Park Chung Hee and the Industrialization of South Korea	340
	Democratization and Globalization	344
<b>13.</b>	<b>Vietnam since 1945</b>	350
	The French Withdrawal, and America’s War	350
	The Socialist Republic of Vietnam	356
	Vietnam, East Asia, and the World	358
<b>14.</b>	<b>China since 1945</b>	359
	The Chinese Civil War	359
	Chairman Mao’s New China	360
	<i>The Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution</i>	363
	<i>Nixon and Mao</i>	366



---

Deng Xiaoping and Market-based Economic Reform	369
Tiananmen	373
Greater China	377
<i>Singapore</i>	377
<i>Hong Kong</i>	379
<i>Taiwan</i>	383
China and Globalization	390
<i>Afterword</i>	399
<i>Character List</i>	401
<i>Notes</i>	419
<i>Index</i>	447

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-11873-7 — A History of East Asia  
2nd Edition  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

## List of Illustrations

1.1. Shang Dynasty bronze bell	<i>page</i> 28
2.1. Eastern Han Dynasty bronze model horse and carriage	51
3.1. Northern Wei Dynasty funerary statuette of horseman	68
3.2. Colossal Northern Wei Dynasty stone Buddha at Yun'gang	74
3.3. Bird-shaped Korean earthenware vessel, second–third centuries	83
3.4. Silla period Korean silver crown	86
3.5. Japanese female <i>Haniwa</i> figurine, fifth–sixth centuries	90
4.1. Painting of a Tang Dynasty horse by Han Gan, eighth-century China	108
4.2. Bronze statue of Maitreya (the Future Buddha), seventh-century Korea	115
4.3. The Great Buddha of Nara, eighth-century Japan	125
5.1. Examination compound, Guangzhou (Canton), China	138
5.2. Ma Yuan, “Viewing Plum Blossoms by Moonlight,” Song Dynasty China	140
5.3. Heiji Scroll illustration of Japanese warrior tale	157
5.4. The Golden Pavilion, Japan	162
6.1. Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou, China	173
6.2. Portrait of the Qianlong Emperor as the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī	176
6.3. Portrait of the Jesuit missionary Nicholas Trigault, by Peter Paul Rubens	181
6.4. Wrestling scene, after Kim Hong-do, nineteenth-century Korea	185
6.5. Calligraphy by Chinese-born Zen monk Nangen, seventeenth-century Japan	191
6.6. Hokusai, “The Great Wave at Kanagawa”	195
6.7. Photograph of a nineteenth-century Japanese samurai	196
7.1. Dong Son bronze drum	200
7.2. Cham Bodhisattva	212
8.1. Hiroshige III, “Picture of a Steam Locomotive along the Yokohama Waterfront”	218
8.2. The Shanghai Bund, ca. 1932	232
8.3. Empress Dowager Cixi with foreign envoys' wives	233
8.4. Ninth U.S. Infantry in Beijing, 1901	235

xii List of Illustrations

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8.5. Kojong, emperor of Korea	237
8.6. West Gate of Seoul, ca. 1904	241
8.7. Korean women with a sedan chair	242
8.8. Itō Hirobumi, the first prime minister of Japan	250
8.9. Silk-reeling factory built at Tomioka, Japan, in 1872	253
9.1. The Ming tombs in north China, 1907	260
9.2. Dr. and Mrs. Sun Yat-sen	262
9.3. Beijing, ca. 1925	266
9.4. Deng Xiaoping in France, 1920	268
9.5. “Naval Battle of the Russo-Japanese War at Chinmulpo,” 1904	274
9.6. Showroom of the Mitsukoshi Dry-Goods Store, Japan, 1911	278
9.7. Advertisement for Kirin beer, 1937	279
9.8. Caricature of Europeanized Vietnamese playing tennis	284
10.1. The Japanese battleship <i>Yamato</i>	289
10.2. Mao Zedong at an airfield, 1936	299
10.3. Bombing of Shanghai at the start of World War II	302
10.4. Surrender ceremony aboard the USS <i>Missouri</i> at the end of World War II	309
11.1. The Toyota Toyopet, Japan’s first export automobile	318
11.2. The Taipei 101, with an advertisement for “Japanese-style Ramen” noodles	327
12.1. War-weary Korean girl by a stalled M-26 tank during the Korean War	335
12.2. Satellite photograph of East Asia at night	337
12.3. South Korean president Park Chung Hee, 1961	340
13.1. Ho Chi Minh declaring Vietnamese independence, 1945	351
13.2. Buddhist self-immolation, Saigon, 1963	355
14.1. Mao era propaganda poster	363
14.2. President Nixon meets Chairman Mao, 1972	368
14.3. Chiang Ching-kuo, Chiang Kai-shek, and Song Meiling	388
14.4. Constructing the <i>Goddess of Democracy</i> in Tiananmen Square, 1989	392

## List of Maps

Introduction.1. East Asia Physical	<i>page</i> 4
1.1. Language Families, Languages, and Major Dialects of Chinese	16
2.1. The Warring States, 350 BCE	35
2.2. The Qin Empire, ca. 210 BCE	46
2.3. The Han Dynasty under Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BCE)	54
2.4. The Chinese Three Kingdoms and East Asia in 250 CE	57
3.1. States and Peoples in 410 CE	61
3.2. Three Kingdoms Korea, ca. 500 CE	87
4.1. East Asia in 650 CE	109
5.1. East Asia in 1050 CE	134
5.2. The Mongol World Empire, ca. 1300	144
6.1. East Asia in 1800	182
7.1. Lingnan, ca. 400 CE	204
7.2. Dai Viet, ca. 1200 CE	208
8.1. Shanghai and Vicinity, ca. 1930	231
8.2. Tokugawa Japan, ca. 1860	246
8.3. French Indochina	256
10.1. Manchuria, ca. 1920	292
10.2. East Asia in 1937	301
10.3. World War II in East Asia and the Pacific	306
14.1. The People's Republic of China	361
14.2. Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Macao	380

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-11873-7 — A History of East Asia  
2nd Edition  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

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## Pronunciation Guide

(Where not indicated otherwise, pronunciations are approximately as might be expected by American English speakers.)

### Chinese

East Asians normally simply do not use the Roman alphabet, but for the purpose of transcribing the sounds of East Asian words in our alphabet a number of different spelling systems have been devised. For Mandarin Chinese, a spelling system called *pinyin* is increasingly standard. In pinyin, the vowels and diphthongs (two vowels that combine to form a single syllable) of Mandarin are pronounced approximately as follows:

*a* as in **ah**

*ai* like the **igh** in **sigh** or **high**

*ao* like the **ow** in **how now brown cow**

*e* like the **u** in **but**

*ei* like the **ay** in **May day**

*i* as in **police** or like the **ee** in **feet** – except in the combinations *chi* (where it sounds more like the **chi** in **chirp**), *ci* (where it sounds more like the **si** in **popsicle**), *ri* (where it sounds more like the **ur** in **urban**), *shi* (where it sounds more like the **shou** in **should**), *si* (where it sounds more like the **si** in **sibling**), *zhi* (where it sounds more like the **Ge** in **German**), and *zi* (where it sounds more like the **zi** in **ziggurat**)

*o* like the **ou** in **ought**

*ou* like **oh**, or the **o** in **Oklahoma**

*u* like the **o** in **who** or the **oo** in **hoot**

Some exceptional combinations follow:

*ui* sounds more like **oo-eigh** rather than **oo-ee**

*yan* sounds like **yen** (rhymes with **Zen**) rather than **yahn**

-ian (in such words as *bian*, *lian*, *nian*, etc.) sounds like **-ee-en** (as in **Zen**) rather than **-ee-ahn**

*yi* sounds no different from a solitary *i* (as in *police*) – in other words, the *i* sound in isolation, or at the beginning of a word, is by convention spelled *yi*

A few unusual consonants in pinyin follow:

*c* sounds like the **ts** in the Russian title **Tsar** (the word *cui* therefore sounds like **ts-oo-eigh**, pronounced together quickly)

*q* sounds like the **ch** in **chance** (*Qin* therefore sounds like **cheen**)

*x* sounds like **hs** or the **s** in **see** (*Xia* therefore sounds like **hs-ee-ah**, pronounced together quickly)

*zh* sounds like the **j** in **jay** (*zhou* therefore sounds just like the familiar English name **Joe**)

Each Chinese syllable also always has a distinct tone, which is not, however, normally indicated in writing and therefore cannot be guessed from the spelling.

There are a number of alternate Chinese spelling systems still in circulation (though they are not used in this book) and several old, irregular spellings (and associated pronunciations) that have become conventionally established in English usage such as Peking for Beijing, Canton for Guangzhou, Sun Yat-sen for the man more commonly known in Mandarin as Sun Zhongshan, and Chiang Kai-shek for Jiang Jieshi.

## Japanese

The vowels and diphthongs in Japanese are pronounced approximately as follows:

*a* as in **ah**

*ai* like the **igh** in **sigh** or **high**

*e* as in **ten**

*ei* like the **ay** in **May day**

*i* as in **police**

*o* as in **oh**, or the **o** in **Oklahoma**

*ō* (with a macron) is pronounced just like *o* but is sustained for twice the duration

*u* is like the **o** in **who** or the **oo** in **hoot**

*ū* (with a macron) is pronounced just like *u* but is sustained for twice the duration

When other vowels appear next to each other in Japanese, they are each pronounced separately rather than combined into a single-syllable diphthong. For example *ii* is pronounced **ee-ee**.

After an initial *s*, the *u* in Japanese is often also nearly silent. *Sukiyaki*, for example, sounds more like s'kiyaki.

## Korean

The vowels and diphthongs in Korean are pronounced approximately as follows:

*a* as in **ah**

*ae* like the **a** in **hat**



- e* as in **ten**
- i* as in **police**
- o* like the **o** in **orbit**
- õ* like the **au** in **caught**
- u* like the **o** in **who** or the **oo** in **hoot**
- ũ* like the **u** in **put**
- ũi* like **we**

Note also that in Korean pronunciation, the consonant pairs *ch/j*, *k/g*, *p/b*, *r/l*, *s/sh*, and *t/d* are not necessarily clearly distinguished (technically, in one widely used spelling system, they are distinguished with the aid of an apostrophe, e.g., **ch'** represents the English **ch** sound and **ch** the English **j** sound, with *tch*, *kk*, *pp*, *ss*, and *tt* indicating further subtle shades of difference). Chosŏn, for example, therefore sometimes appears spelled as Joseon (with the *õ* sound being represented by *eo*), Koguryŏ as Goguryeo, Paekche as Baekje, and Silla as Shilla.

## Vietnamese

Vietnamese is the only East Asian language that is normally written today (in modern times) using the Roman alphabet. The standard Romanization system is called *quốc ngữ*, which means “national language.” In addition to special marks indicating five of the six tones (like Chinese, Vietnamese is a tonal language, but, unlike Chinese, the tones are conventionally indicated in writing), several other diacritical (accent) marks are also used to distinguish different pronunciations. For example, the letter *d* written with a line through it (Đ, đ) is pronounced like the English letter *d*, but without a line through it a *d* sounds more like the English letter *z*. Unfortunately, because the Vietnamese diacritical markings are complicated, they are frequently dispensed with in English-language publications, as is the case in the present volume. Without the diacritic markings it is not always possible to know how to correctly pronounce a Vietnamese word.

Distinctive vowels and diphthongs in Vietnamese include:

- a* is pronounced as **ah**, or as in **father**
- â* and *ã* are shorter in pronunciation than *a*
- e* is pronounced like the **a** in **average**
- ê* is pronounced like the **ay** in **say**
- i* is pronounced as like the **e** in **creek**
- o* is pronounced **aw**
- ơ* is pronounced as in **uh** or **fur**
- ô* is pronounced as **oh**, or as in **go**
- u* is pronounced as **ooh**, or as in **root**
- ư* is pronounced as in **should**
- ia* is pronounced as **eeah**
- ua* is pronounced as **üah**
- ua* is pronounced **oah**

Distinctive consonants and consonantal combinations include:

*c, k, and q* are pronounced as in **cat**, or like the **k** in **thank**

*d* is pronounced as **z**

*ḏ* is pronounced as **d**

*g* is pronounced as in **good**

*kh* is pronounced something like the **h** in **hut**

*ng* is pronounced something like **nuhguh**

*nh* is pronounced something like **ny**

*r* is pronounced like the **zh** in Doctor **Zhivago**

*s* is pronounced **sh**

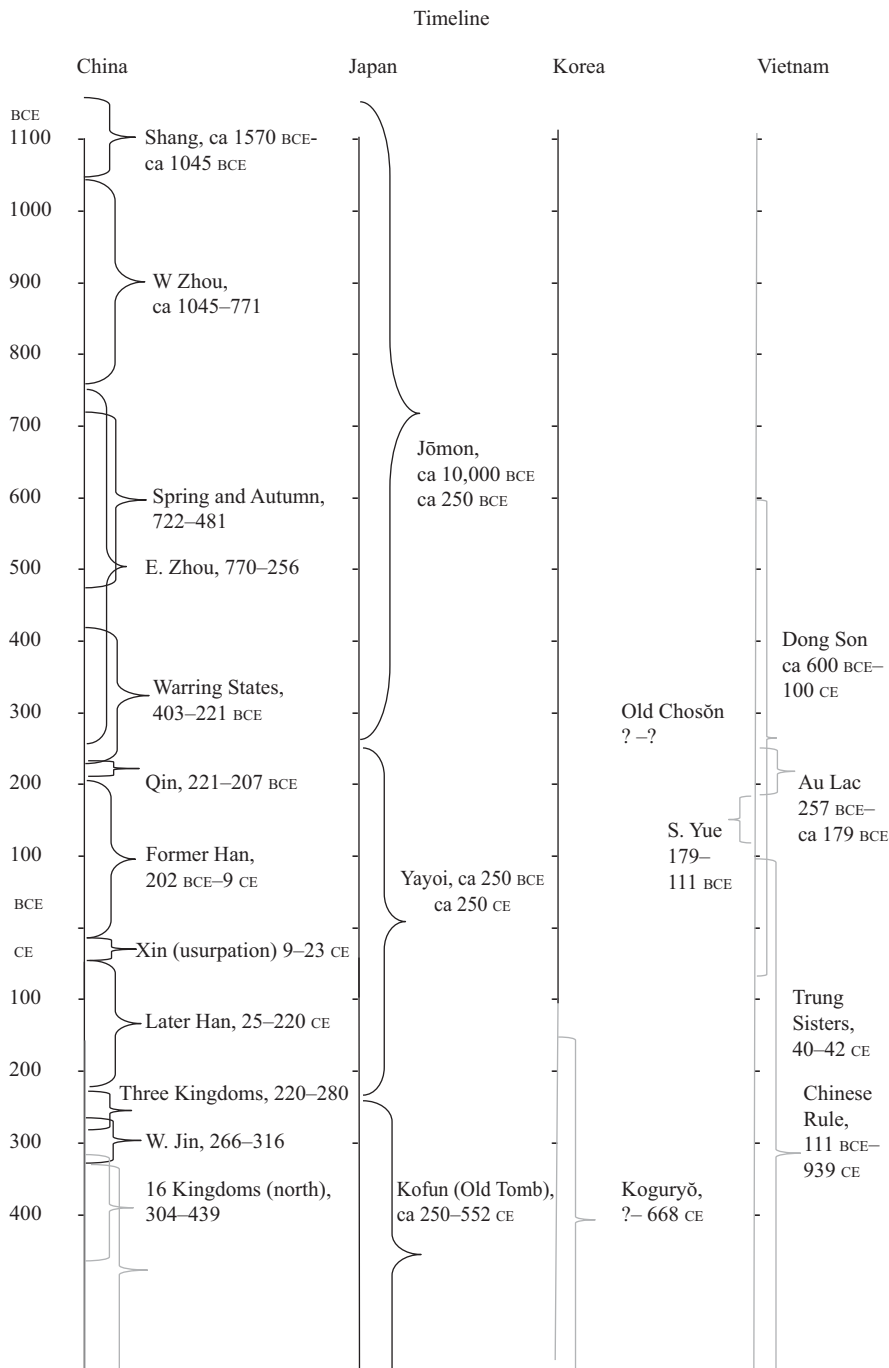
*t* is unaspirated, and pronounced like the **t** in standard: almost a **dull** sound

*th* is pronounced as the English letter **t**

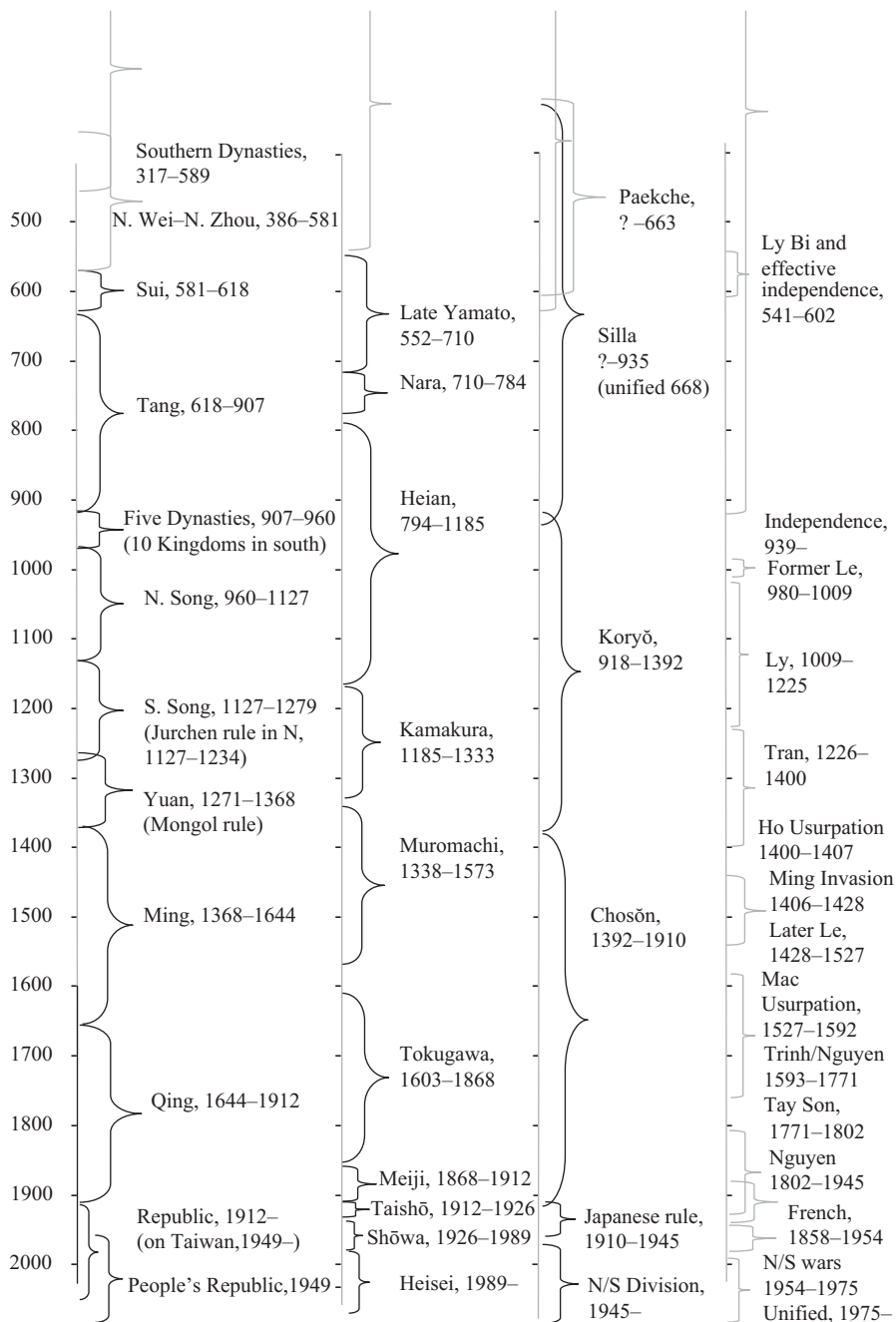
*tr* is pronounced **tch**

*x* is pronounced as **s**

# Timeline: Dynasties and Major Historical Periods



xx Timeline: Dynasties and Major Historical Periods



## Glossary

Altaic	A major, somewhat hypothetical north Eurasian language family, possibly including the Turkic, Mongolic, Manchu, Japanese, Korean, and other languages
Amaterasu	The Japanese sun goddess
Annam	A premodern name for Vietnam (in French colonial times, specifically central Vietnam)
Bakufu	The military “tent government” of the Japanese shōguns
Bodhisattva	An altruistic enlightened Buddhist being (Sanskrit)
Bushi	A Japanese “military gentleman,” or samurai
Chaebōl	A post–World War II South Korean conglomerate (written with the same two Chinese characters as the pre–World War II Japanese word <i>zaibatsu</i> )
Cham	Austronesian-speaking people living in what is today central Vietnam
Chanoyu	The Japanese tea ceremony
Chosŏn	Korea
Cochinchina	European name for southern Vietnam
Comintern	The Communist International, an organization based in Moscow from 1919 to 1943 (English abbreviation)
Daimyō	“Great name”: the lord of a regional domain in late premodern Japan
Dao Tong	The Neo-Confucian “Transmission of the Way” (in Chinese)
Dhāraṇī	A Buddhist magical formula (Sanskrit)
Enka	A popular sentimental modern Japanese musical style
Falun Gong	A new “traditional” Chinese religion, founded in 1992 and currently banned in the People’s Republic of China
Guandong	Chinese for “East of the Passes,” with reference to early twentieth-century Japanese military activity, usually referring to Manchuria (and frequently spelled “Kwantung” in older publications)
Guanzhong	The region “Within the Passes”: a Chinese geographical area roughly corresponding to modern Shaanxi Province

Guomindang	The Chinese Nationalist Party, alternatively spelled “Kuo-Min-Tang” in the older Wade-Giles spelling system (and abbreviated either GMD or KMT)
Guoyu	The Chinese National Language, or Mandarin
Hakka	“Guest Families” (Mandarin: <i>Kejia</i> ): a Chinese sub-ethnic group
Han’guk	“The Country of the Han”: Korea
Han’gŭl	The Korean alphabet
Hanzi	Chinese characters or written symbols
Hiragana	A Japanese syllabary, or set of phonetic written symbols representing complete syllables
Hu	A generic Chinese name for northern non-Chinese peoples, used especially during the Age of Division
Huangdi	The Chinese term for <i>emperor</i>
Huaxia	China
Hwarang	“Flower Youths”: aristocratic young warriors in Silla (Korea)
Jinshi	“Presented Scholar”: the highest degree in the late imperial Chinese examination system
Juche	The modern North Korean ideology of self-reliance
Junzi	Literally the “son of a Lord” but used by Confucius to refer to anyone who behaved as a proper gentleman should (in Chinese)
Kami	Japanese gods or spirits
Kantō	Japanese for “East of the Passes,” referring to the largest Japanese agricultural plain in the vicinity of modern Tōkyō
Katakana	A Japanese syllabary, or set of phonetic written symbols representing complete syllables – now chiefly used to write Western loanwords
Keigo	The Japanese “respect language”
Keiretsu	Post-World War II Japanese enterprise groups
Kokutai	Pre-World War II Japan’s “national polity”
Kolp’um	Aristocratic “bone rank” in Silla (Korea)
Kuo-Min-Tang	The Chinese Nationalist Party, alternatively spelled “Guomindang” in pinyin (and abbreviated either GMD or KMT)
Kwantung	Chinese for “East of the Passes,” with reference to early twentieth-century Japanese military activity, usually referring to Manchuria (and now spelled “Guandong” in pinyin)
Li	“Courtesy,” “propriety,” “rites,” or “ceremony” (in Chinese)
Li	The organizing “principle” or “principles” for <i>qi</i> , or “matter,” in Neo-Confucian philosophy (in Chinese) (note: this word <i>li</i> is written with an entirely different character from the preceding <i>li</i> , meaning “courtesy”)
Lingnan	“South of the mountain ranges,” a region of early imperial south China that included the modern provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi and what is now northern Vietnam
Logograph	A nonphonetic written symbol, such as a Chinese character, used to represent a word in a particular language (a newly coined English term)
Maripkan	Early native Korean royal title
Minzu	The modern Chinese word for “nation,” in the sense of “a people”

MITI	The Ministry of International Trade and Industry in post–World War II Japan (English abbreviation)
Nihon	Japan
Nirvāṇa	“Extinction,” or Buddhist enlightenment (Sanskrit)
Nom	A system for writing the Vietnamese language, derived from Chinese characters.
Pinyin	Literally, “to spell the sound”: the modern phonetic system for spelling Chinese using the Roman alphabet that was developed in the People’s Republic of China
Qaghan	A supreme Mongol and Turkic title, meaning roughly Khan of Khans, or Great Khan
Qi	The basic matter or substance of the universe according to Neo-Confucian philosophy (in Chinese)
Qipao	“Banner gown,” a Chinese female fashion that derived from Manchu clothing styles (in Chinese)
Qiren	“Banner People,” an alternate name for the Manchus (in the Chinese language)
Quoc ngu	System of writing Vietnamese using the Roman alphabet
Ren	The Confucian virtue of humanity (in Chinese)
Rōnin	Japanese masterless samurai
Rujiao	The “Teachings of the Ru,” or Confucian scholars (in Chinese)
Samsāra	The cycle of existence: birth and death (Sanskrit)
Sankin kōtai	The alternate attendance system for daimyō in Tokugawa Japan
SCAP	Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers during the postwar occupation of Japan (English abbreviation)
Shangdi	“The Lord on High”: the supreme ancient Chinese deity (and a term sometimes also used as a Chinese translation for the Christian God)
Shintō	“The Way of the Spirits”: the indigenous Japanese religion
Shōgun	“General”: the premodern Japanese military overlord
Śramaṇa	A Buddhist monk (Sanskrit)
Sūtra	A sermon attributed to the Buddha (Sanskrit)
Taigi-meibun	The moral obligation of fulfilling the role proper to one’s title or status (in Japanese)
Taiji	The “supreme ultimate” in Neo-Confucian philosophy (in Chinese)
Taotie	A common design on ancient Chinese bronze vessels
Tatami	The floor matting in late premodern Japanese buildings
Tennō	“Heavenly Sovereign”: the standard Japanese imperial title
Tianming	The Chinese Mandate of Heaven
Tianxia	Chinese for “Under Heaven,” referring to the royal or imperial realm
Tianzi	Chinese for “Son of Heaven,” referring to the supreme ruler
Tonkin	European name for northern Vietnam
Topolect	A proposed alternate term for the Chinese dialects (in English)
Tripiṭaka	The “Three Baskets,” or the complete set of Buddhist Scriptures (Sanskrit)
Uji	A Japanese lineage or descent group

Viet Cong	Southern term for Vietnamese Communists
Vietminh	League for the Independence of Vietnam
Wuwei	The Daoist principle of nonaction (in Chinese)
Xiao	The Confucian virtue of filial piety (in Chinese)
Yangban	The “two orders” of premodern Korean civil and military aristocracy
Yuan	The modern Chinese currency (also known in the People’s Republic of China as <i>renminbi</i> )
Zaibatsu	The great business conglomerates of pre–World War II Japan
Zhong	The Confucian virtue of loyalty (in Chinese)
Zhongguo	The “Central Country” or “Middle Kingdom,” that is, China