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.

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

CHARLES HOLCOMBE
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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-igh* 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
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 **ŏ** 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 (Ð, 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
- **ă** and **ả** are shorter in pronunciation than **a**
- **e** is pronounced like the **a** in average
- **è** 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**
- **ố** is pronounced as **oh**, or as in **go**
- **u** is pronounced as **ooh**, or as in root
- **û** is pronounced as in **should**
- **ù** is pronounced as ceah
- **ua** is pronounced as úah
- **ua** is pronounced ooah
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
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

Timeline

China | Japan | Korea | Vietnam

BCE
1100
Shang, ca 1570 BCE–ca 1045 BCE

W Zhou, ca 1045–771

300–221 BCE
Warring States, 403–221 BCE

722–481
Spring and Autumn, 722–481

770–256
E. Zhou, 770–256

202 BCE–9 CE
Former Han, 202 BCE–9 CE

9–23 CE
Xin (usurpation)

25–220 CE
Later Han, 25–220 CE

220–280
Three Kingdoms, 220–280

266–316
W. Jin, 266–316

1570 BCE
Shang, ca 1570 BCE–ca 1045 BCE

10,000 BCE
Jōmon, ca 10,000 BCE–ca 250 BCE

722–481
Spring and Autumn, 722–481

770–256
E. Zhou, 770–256

220–280
Three Kingdoms, 220–280

266–316
W. Jin, 266–316

202 BCE–9 CE
Former Han, 202 BCE–9 CE

9–23 CE
Xin (usurpation)

25–220 CE
Later Han, 25–220 CE

220–280
Three Kingdoms, 220–280

266–316
W. Jin, 266–316

1570 BCE
Shang, ca 1570 BCE–ca 1045 BCE

1000 BCE
W. Zhou, ca 1045–771

600 BCE
S. Yue, ca 250 BCE–ca 250 BCE

550 BCE
Koguryo, ca 600 BCE–100 CE

257 BCE
A. Lac, ca 100 BCE–ca 179 CE

111 BCE
Old Choson, 257 BCE–ca 179 CE

179–439
Chinese Rule, 111 BCE–939 CE

400 CE
Koguryo, ca 668 CE–668 CE

400 BCE
Xin (usurpation), 9–23 CE

100 BCE
Later Han, 25–220 CE

200 BCE
W. Jin, 266–316

300 BCE
16 Kingdoms (north), 304–439

200 BCE
Kofun (Old Tomb), 304–439

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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

Chae-bol A post–World War II South Korean conglomerate (written with the same two Chinese characters as the pre–World War II Japanese word zaibatsu)

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: Kējiā): a Chinese sub-ethnic group |
| Han’guk | “The Country of the Han”: Korea |
| Han’gǔl | 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 emperor |
| 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 qi, or “matter,” in Neo-Confucian philosophy (in Chinese) (note: this word lǐ is written with an entirely different character from the preceding lì, 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)
Tripitaka  The “Three Baskets,” or the complete set of Buddhist Scriptures (Sanskrit)
Uji  A Japanese lineage or descent group
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<td>Vietminh</td>
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<td>Wuwei</td>
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<td>Yangban</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zhongguo</td>
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