

Editor's introduction: What follows are three short essays by the authors of the latest *Key Issues in Asian Studies* (KIAS) booklets. Readers who aren't familiar with KIAS, an AAS series intended for beginning university survey and honors high school students, as well as general readers, should visit <http://www.asian-studies.org/publications/KIAS.htm>.

Modern Chinese History

By David Kenley



In addition to being the most populous country, China is projected to surpass the United States in gross domestic product within a few years. It has a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council and wields tremendous “soft power” throughout the world. For these and other reasons, Americans are fascinated with China. Yet this fascination remains tempered by fear and ignorance. *Modern Chinese History* is not designed specifically to alter American attitudes toward China, but it does provide English-reading students with the back-

ground information necessary for them to approach China from a position of greater understanding. Though many notable historians have added to our general knowledge of Chinese history, their texts are often too weighty for nonspecialists. *Modern Chinese History* provides a concise, accessible introduction to the topic designed specifically for high school and lower-division college students, as well as for general readers.

Two main themes run throughout *Modern Chinese History*. First, it emphasizes the role of foreign actors in China's past. Cross-cultural contacts

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have deeply influenced the shape and trajectory of modern China. However, this text moves beyond the “impact-response” narrative, which outlines repeated conflicts with the superior West followed by China's belated, inadequate responses. Not only is this narrative inaccurate and Eurocentric, it is also incomplete. *Modern Chinese History* emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural contacts but provides a more balanced approach to the topic. It includes encounters with the West, as well as interactions with China's Asian neighbors. Second, this volume highlights the roles of domestic actors in China's history, recognizing that these include far more than simply political and military elites. *Modern Chinese History* provides room for both men and women peasants, soldiers, and intellectuals to enter the stage of history.

Whereas many scholars suggest modern China began during the mid-Qing period in 1840—the date of the Opium War and the beginning of the impact-response cycle—this work begins with the Qing dynasty (1644) and continues to the present day. Furthermore, rather than focusing primarily on twentieth-century events at the expense of earlier eras, roughly half the text covers the Qing period with the other half covering the Republican and Communist eras.

Several individuals will benefit from *Modern Chinese History*. Teachers of history, international studies, cultural studies, and Asian studies will find this text useful. Most notably, it will supplement the world history survey, which is becoming increasingly common on high school and college campuses. Even those colleges that have maintained the Western

civilization survey will find this an appealing option, as instructors are emphasizing the West's interaction with the larger world. Naturally, all types of Asian history classes will profit from this volume.

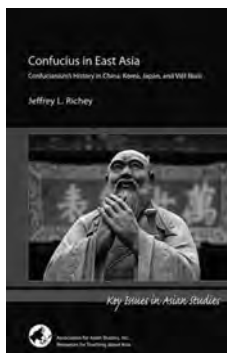
Modern Chinese History offers a succinct introduction to the political, economic, cultural, and social heritage of this powerful and influential nation. Because our students will increasingly interact with this region of the world, it is imperative they have a basic understanding of China. ■



DAVID KENLEY is Associate Professor of Chinese History and Director of Asian Studies at Elizabethtown College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. His teaching and research interests focus on Chinese intellectual history and overseas migration.

Confucius in East Asia

By Jeffrey L. Richey



Confucius in East Asia introduces fundamental patterns of East Asian history, spirituality, society, and politics through the lens of Confucianism's development and impact in the region. For millennia, no East Asian regime has governed independently of Confucian influence; and even when Confucius and his tradition have been criticized or condemned, as has often been the case during the past century or so, they have been conspicuously present in East Asian affairs. It is impossible to understand the East Asian region, its peoples, or its role in global history without knowing something about Confucius, Confucians, and Confucianism. This short book aims to provide such basic knowledge in the contexts of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese history.

Each of the book's four main chapters is devoted to a single country within East Asia as viewed through the lens of Confucianism's historical de-

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velopment, spiritual significance, social impact, and political role there. Every chapter is divided into four sections. First, the origins of Confucianism in the particular country are discussed. Next, for each country, there is an explanation of how self-cultivation—the pursuit of intellectual, moral, and spiritual excellence as defined by the Confucian tradition—has

been practiced in its national context. The third section of each chapter deals with the historical impact of Confucianism on social ideas, institutions, and practices of that country. Finally, each chapter considers the close ties between Confucianism and political institutions in each East Asian nation from antiquity to the present.

The book concludes with a look at Confucianism in contemporary East Asia. In various ways, each of the nations profiled in the book have rehabilitated Confucius as a symbol with meaning for modern East Asians. The governments of China and Việt Nam, although nominally Communist in orientation, annually spend large amounts of money promoting Confucian festivals, paying for the renovation and upkeep of Confucian academies and temples, and generally borrowing the prestige associated with Confucius to enhance the international images of their respective countries. Although modern governments in Japan and South Korea do not formally endorse Confucianism, the legacy of centuries of state support for Confucian traditions in these countries can be seen in everything from official school textbooks to the behavior of politicians in moments of national crisis. Government promotion of Confucianism is hardly the full extent of the tradition's survival in modern times. Confucius and his tradition continue to serve as the basis for East Asian regional identity, as well as a resource for individual Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, and Vietnamese seeking to make sense of contemporary life.

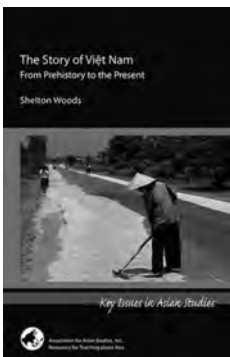
The many different strands of this multifaceted modern Confucianism do not necessarily all tend in the same direction, but they do constitute a web of identity, meaning, and practice that still lies at the foundation of East Asian life. Learning to see the unity and diversity of Confucian traditions across East Asian history, spirituality, society, and politics can help students understand what makes this region so distinctive, dynamic, and important today. ■



JEFFREY L. RICHEY is Associate Professor of Religion and Coordinator of Asian Studies at Berea College. He also serves as Chinese Philosophy Area Editor for the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (www.iep.utm.edu). His research explores classical Confucian and Daoist thought and its transmission and reception in ancient East Asia.

The Story of Việt Nam From Prehistory to the Present

By Shelton Woods



The *Story of Việt Nam* is an overview of Việt Nam's history from the first days of village life along the Red River in the north to the rise of the modern mega metropolis of the south's Hồ Chí Minh City. As the title suggests, the book is a tale—a narrative that is built around four themes: land and freedom, persistence of cultural values, shifting tides of global interests in Việt Nam, and the vital role Việt Nam will play in shaping the twenty-first century.

Việt Nam's rise and fall have always been tied to the land. The earliest Vietnamese communities lived along the Red

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River, where they grew enough rice to survive from harvest to harvest. The economic freedom that rice gave the Vietnamese easily fit into the political autonomy that has been so valued in Việt Nam. *The Story of Việt Nam* demonstrates that though China and France temporarily ruled this part of the world, the Vietnamese never lost their innate desire for liberty and ousted every colonial power that occupied or dominated all or part of Việt Nam. Because of Việt Nam's long history of both East and West colonial domination, this volume is an important study in tracing the evolution of nationalism in an imagined state.

The foreign intrusions into Việt Nam included the transmission of external ideas about spiritual, social, and political matters. *The Story of Việt Nam* carefully outlines the role that Confucianism, Buddhism, and Marxism played in shaping ancient and modern Việt Nam. In each case, these foreign ideas were accepted in Việt Nam but then shaped to fit indigenous values. The Vietnamese accepted Confucian dictates on the importance of rites and relationships but opposed its subordination of women. Việt Nam's long coast invited foreign traders and missionaries. My narrative traces the steps of Buddhist monks who brought the belief system to Việt Nam and depicts how the Vietnamese integrated elements of Buddhism into their existing animistic spirituality. After 1986, the story of Vietnamese transformation of Marxism from largely a command economy to one with a substantial private sector constitutes yet another example of how the culture has modified foreign ideas to meet important needs.

A key to understanding Việt Nam is to see how it was affected by world events, such as China's expanding empire during the Han and Ming dynasties; the Catholic missionary enterprise during the West's Age of Discovery; Western colonialism during the Industrial Revolution; the two World Wars; the Cold War; and the rivalry between the two Communist behemoths—the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. *The Story of Việt Nam* includes a rather poignant example of how Việt Nam's invasion and occupation of Cambodia between 1978 and 1989 was also due, in part, to much larger global considerations.

Four of the ten chapters of this *KIAS* volume are about the Socialist Republic of Việt Nam (SRV) or the post-1975 united Việt Nam. Despite the difficult and often tragic first decade of the SRV's existence, the book's thesis is that Việt Nam's best days are ahead. With a thriving economy and its geographic proximity to East and Southeast Asia, it appears that economic stability, if not prosperity, awaits a population that is disproportionately young compared to many other nations. For the United States, the importance of Việt Nam is not in its past interactions but as a future ally, as both nations seek a Pacific not dominated by China. ■



SHELTON WOODS is Professor of Asian History and the Associate Dean in the College of Social Sciences and Public Affairs at Boise State University. He spent his first eighteen years in the Philippines and earned a PhD in Southeast Asian History from UCLA. His research interests include early twentieth-century colonialism in Southeast Asia and Sino-ASEAN relations. He is the author of numerous articles and five books.