

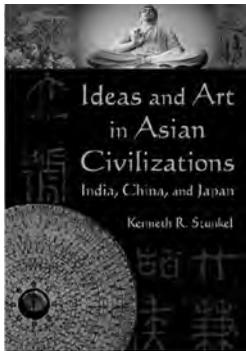
Ideas and Art in Asian Civilizations *India, China, and Japan*

BY KENNETH R. STUNKEL

ARMONK, NEW YORK AND LONDON ENGLAND: M.E. SHARPE, 2012

305 PAGES, ISBN 978-0765625410, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by Nancy Hope



Ideas and Art in Asian Civilizations: India, China, and Japan is set apart from other surveys of Asia by a succinct examination of the cosmology and traditions of thought underlying seminal art and literary works from these three cultures. Explanations such as “[the] Chinese way of thinking is profoundly relational rather than sequential” (98) and “[the] poignancy of change is seen as a source of Buddhist enlightenment rather than an obstacle” (232) are sure to assist the reader in understanding the selected works on a deeper level.

The author makes this approach clear from the start, stating that works of art are the “most direct response” to universal concerns, including social and religious organization, relationships between past and present, and between humans and nature (3). He further asserts that the Indian, Chinese, and Japanese answers to such issues as embodied in the arts have value, especially today, because their difference from American traditions will “sharpen knowledge, appreciation and criticism of beliefs and practices normally taken for granted” (6). He therefore makes an effort to contrast Asian and Western systems, noting, for example, the philosophy of John Stuart Mill when discussing the Indian view of individual personality (34). This is an approach that undergraduate and advanced high school instructors will welcome. It is, moreover, matched by top-notch content throughout the book.

The book is hampered by three minor drawbacks, however. Thankfully, errata is not among them, with only four found—the Heian period, dated as “1794–1192” (197), the artist Sesshū called “Sessue” and “Sesshue” (213, 236), and Figure 26.33 titled “*Willows, colors over gold, paper mounted on silk, folds indicating it was an incense wrapper*” when it is *White Plum Blossoms*, one of a pair of two-fold screens, color and gold leaf on paper.

The first drawback is in using the Wade-Giles system for Chinese transliteration, even though the alternate pinyin system has been employed in the West by institutions like the Library of Congress for at least twenty-five years. Spelling the dynasty that succeeded the Shang as “Chou,” for example, will not help the nonexpert reader for whom this book is intended. Perhaps because most of the literature in the annotated bibliography (271–288) is from the mid-twentieth century, the author believed Wade-Giles to be the appropriate choice. Instead, it would have been better to include more recent publications in the bibliography. Another drawback is that not all of the fine distinctions the author insightfully makes are formatted to facilitate learning. How much easier it is to comprehend and retain the bulleted list of eight forces that shaped Japanese thought (194) as opposed to the seven objectives of Indian philosophy that are strung together in one long sentence (28). The last drawback is that sometimes information is introduced without any elaboration, or it is defined much later in the text. For instance, it would have been helpful if at least the date of the “Tokugawa edict of seclusion and exclusion” (231) was given. Likewise, the “dual way”

of *samurai* and *daimyō* is briefly mentioned in connection with the tea ceremony (222), but it is not explained more until three pages later.

Nevertheless, these drawbacks do not negate the quality of information this book presents overall. It would certainly benefit those just beginning their study of Asian civilizations as well as those further down the path. Even more accomplished Asianists will be able to appreciate facts about India, China, and Japan not previously known. The detailed recipe for ink sticks (161) was delightful in this regard. ■

NANCY HOPE, the Associate Director of the Kansas Consortium for Teaching about Asia at the University of Kansas, has been helping K-14 educators learn more about China, Korea, and Japan for the past twelve years.

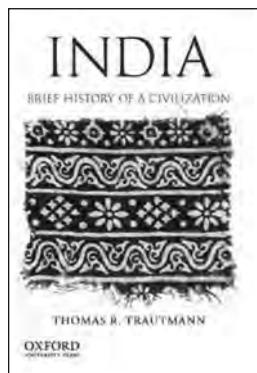
India *Brief History of a Civilization*

BY THOMAS R. TRAUTMANN

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2011

248 PAGES, ISBN: 978-0199736324, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by Thomas Lamont



Finding the perfect textbook for a survey course can be daunting. Writing such a book is surely exponentially daunting. Thomas Trautmann, Professor of History and Anthropology at the University of Michigan, understands the first point all too well, and he picks up the challenge of the second point with his unassuming yet impressive new book, *India: Brief History of a Civilization*, a book that might work well as a text in an introductory or survey course on India at the college level or as supplementary reading in high school courses on India or

world history. Regardless of how it might be used in the classroom, *India: Brief History of a Civilization* would be a useful resource for teachers and professors who would like to learn more about the origins of Indian civilization and the general outlines of Indian history, especially premodern India.

At the beginning of his book, Trautmann writes that most books that strive to succeed as a textbook in a survey course are “too long, too detailed, and [have] too many names and terms to master for students new to the subject.” His hope is that *India: Brief History of a Civilization* is short enough to be read in a few sittings yet comprehensive in coverage and that it “will give newcomers a quick overview of a very long period, so that in a short time they will acquire a mental map of the history of Indian civilization as a whole, a basic stock of names and technical terms, and a rough sense of the chronology.”

Trautmann is refreshingly humble about the challenge of covering so vast a subject as Indian civilization, and at the start of the book, he essentially warns the reader of the pitfalls at hand while he gently, even warmly, invites the reader to proceed with an open mind. The author sensibly approaches the subject with caution, eschewing spurious generalizations and grandiose claims about Indian civilization, instead preferring to