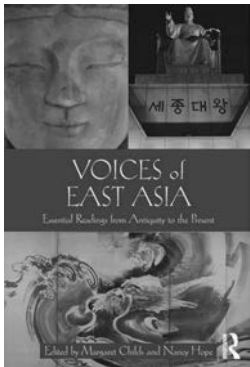


Voices of East Asia: Essential Readings from Antiquity to the Present

MARGARET CHILDS AND NANCY HOPE, EDS.
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Reviewed by Christa Adams



One result of the expanding interest in East Asian history, culture, and religious beliefs amongst non-Asian-language readers and learners is the production of valuable source-driven texts like *Voices of East Asia: Essential Readings from Antiquity to the Present*, edited by Margaret Childs and Nancy Hope. By specifically focusing on content derived from China, Japan, and Korea, the authors provide readers with a curated selection of translated primary source excerpt content arranged in chronological sequence, dating from antiquity to the contemporary era.

As such, *Voices of East Asia* becomes a useful reference for instructors of and students enrolled in advanced high school- or survey-level collegiate courses in East Asian history, religious studies, or literature.

Voices of East Asia is broadly divided into three sections, each presenting content originating in China, Japan, and Korea. Following the preface, the editors provide readers with a clear historical timeline of each country, helping situate the included readings within a given historical narrative framework. Additionally, Childs and Hope include a pronunciation guide for readers lacking prior exposure to the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean languages. Clarification of the differences between pinyin and the Wade-Giles systems of transliterating Chinese characters is likewise included; this is particularly helpful for readers who might be confused by differing methods of transliterating the same Chinese word or phrase. Within the sections on Japanese and Korean readings, the authors discuss proper pronunciation, as well as the emergence of phonetic scripts like *hiragana* in Japan and *hangul* in Korea.

The editors preface each of the book's three sections on China, Japan, and Korea with a brief historical essay that acquaints readers with periods of rule or governance in the region. Major political leaders, intellectuals, authors, and poets featured in the section are also introduced, along with brief synopses of emergent religious ideologies or popular social practices. Excerpt readings are arranged by China, Japan, and Korea divisions and are prefaced with short descriptions of authors (if known), along with the historical significance or impact of the reading on the region at large. Topic- and period-appropriate imagery is employed throughout the book. Childs and Hope also provide questions for analysis before each translated excerpt in the volume, prompting individual analysis of the selection while simultaneously supplying fodder for potential group discussions.

Arguably, the strongest of the three sections is the first, focusing on the history, culture, and religious ideals of China. Following a comprehensive historical introduction, readers encounter excerpt translations from *The Book of Songs* and *The Book of Documents* that each introduce important themes linked to broadly defined behavioral expectations and the notion

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of imperial China's "Mandate of Heaven" ideal, which granted just rulers the right to govern. This important concept was later championed by Confucius, whose ideas, published in the *Analects*, are excerpted next, along with those of Mencius, an adherent born over 100 years after Confucius. Selections from the Daoist *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* complete the introduction of ancient Chinese philosophical and religious ideals. The editors next turn to poetry, selecting representative examples from authors living during the Six Dynasties period (220–589 CE) and the Tang dynasty (618–906 CE). The Tang Era section includes important selections from two of China's most well-known medieval poets: Li Bai and Du Fu. Several longer prose excerpts produced in late medieval China follow; these include sections from Wang Shifu's *The West Chamber*; Wu Cheng'en's *Journey to the West*, which explores emergent Buddhist themes; and Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong's *Outlaws of the Marsh*. The chapter concludes with short stories by the Republican era (1912–1949) author and activist Lu Xun, and essays by Mao Zedong on the value of China's peasant proletariat and the Nobel Prize-winning contemporary author Mo Yan. Throughout this section, readers can examine the ways cultural and philosophical ideals were transmitted, adopted, rejected, and reconfigured throughout Chinese history. The sampling also provides readers with a basic introduction to several core religious and secular texts that influenced both Chinese cultural practices and those of surrounding states.

The next section, focusing on the history and literature of Japan, is less comprehensive than that of the prior chapter and features a less well-defined historical narrative essay. However, the editors do clearly present the important cultural, religious, and linguistic links that emerged between China and Japan, illustrating how these subsequently guided Sino-Japanese relations from antiquity through the modern period. The section begins with an overview of Japanese poetry, dating from the ancient Asuka period (538–710 CE) to the very modern aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011. Presumably, the broad nature of this section is meant to convey to readers the role of poetic expression in Japan along a kind of historical narrative continuum. Perhaps greater historical contextualization of the included excerpts would strengthen this section. Next, the editors present readers with excerpts from the work of two important female authors of the Heian period (794–1185 CE): Sei Shōnagon and Murasaki Shikibu. These excerpts, from *The Pillow Book* and *The Tale of Genji*, are representative of classic medieval Japanese prose and are thus essential reading when discussing the impact of the Japanese court on popular cultural ideals during this period. These selections also illuminate the nature of elite gender relations during the Heian. *Tales of Times Now Past* and *Lord Kikui's Wife* collectively introduce readers to several Buddhist selections that illustrate the nature of religious life and practice in Japan, while simultaneously revealing links to established Chinese and Korean Buddhist practice. Yoshida Kenkō's *Essays in Idleness* provide insight into intellectual musings penned during a period of political upheaval, when military lords

called *shōguns* contested the power of Japan's imperial court. The work of Edo period (1600–1868 CE) author Ihara Saikaku introduces readers to the subject matter presented in popular literature of the period, which typically satirized and critiqued the militaristic and male-centered culture of the Tokugawa regime's samurai-centered social hierarchy. The section ends with longer prose selections from Higuchi Ichiyo's *Jusan'ya*, *The Thirteenth Night*, Natsume Soseki's *Stories*, and Nakazawa Keiji's *A Sudden Flash of Light*, excerpted from his autobiographical manga text *Hiroshima: The Autobiography of Barefoot Gen*.

The shortest section in this book deals with poetry and prose penned in Korea. In the historical introduction to this section, Childs and Hope indicate that Korea, from antiquity through the early twentieth century, was closely connected culturally, politically, religiously, and linguistically to both China and later Japan. Chinese Confucian ideals provided institutional legitimization, while Buddhism later informed personal religious practice in the country. That said, the editors do provide readers with a small selection of important Korean excerpts that serve to reveal the influence of outside cultures, as well as illuminate the role of indigenous ideals in Korean literary production. The section begins with an excerpt from *Tan'gun*, the Korean myth of the founding of the country. The next excerpt, Ho Kyun's *The Tale of Hong Kiltong*, simultaneously references the Chinese *Outlaws of the Marsh*, while providing a critique of the medieval Chosŏn dynasty's (1392–1910) rigid and exclusionary class hierarchy. The editors next present selections of Chosŏn era Korean *sijo* poetry, followed by the *Song of a Faithful Wife*, *Ch'un-hyang*, an example of a *p'ansori*, or Korean vernacular opera. The chapter concludes with excerpts from the work of modern Korean fiction, produced by authors Hwang Sunwon and O Yongsu.

Voices of East Asia: Essential Readings from Antiquity to the Present is best-suited for use in advanced high school or undergraduate collegiate survey courses on East Asian history. It is particularly suitable for use in those courses that place emphasis on student engagement with and analysis of primary source materials. Religious studies or literature faculty might likewise find some excerpts from the book useful for employment in class. Although comprehensive, the book can be further strengthened with the addition of greater internal historical contextualization of the included excerpt readings. Additionally, the role of regional influence and cultural cross-pollination, while hinted at throughout the book, should be more explicitly explored throughout. That said, *Voices of East Asia* is an impressively organized reader that would enhance student comprehension of the sometimes-complex historical, cultural, and religious ideals that emerged in East Asia and continue to influence the lives of individuals living in the modern nation-states of China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. ■

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Asia Pacific in World Politics

Second Edition

BY DEREK MCDUGALL

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Reviewed by Mary M. McCarthy



As students walk into Comparative Asian Politics on the first day of class, they see a quote projected on the screen: “East Asia is now widely regarded as the focus of the world’s attention.”¹ It is shortly joined by a second quote, “Learning about contemporary Southeast Asia can be a challenge because the region is no longer a primary focus of international attention.”² Students consider: Do these quotes contradict each other? Are they talking about the same region? What are the bases for such contentions? They must problematize the very concept of Asia (East Asia, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, Asia Pacific) and deconstruct these categories, unveiling the great diversity within and fluidity across divisions. They then further delve into how our understanding and knowledge of this region are significantly colored by the news cycle, as well as our own history and culture.

Derek McDougall's book, *Asia Pacific in World Politics*, demands an explicit engagement with these very tasks of conceptualizing the region, its primary actors, and dynamics, as well as conveys to the reader where one should focus one's attention and why. From the title that he chooses to the cases that he targets to the ordering of his chapters, McDougall is making pedagogical, as well as pragmatically and theoretically driven, choices. The strength of the book is that these choices are made consciously and overtly. The weakness, in the eyes of some, may be that the title is misleading and the content disappointingly narrow or insufficiently deep. We as instructors then have to decide if it meets our pedagogical goals in the classroom. For many, the answer will be yes, especially if used as a reference book or as a background text to be supplemented by additional resources that go into more depth on specific issues or case studies.

Asia is an area that is receiving heightened global interest across the political, economic, and security spheres. It is home to the second- and third-largest economies in the world, some of the greatest international security challenges, and the largest Muslim-majority population. It is an ideal region to study everything from economic and human development to democratization to authoritarian resilience to separatist movements. Units on countries or issues within Asia are now commonplace in general survey courses on international politics and world history. Students without much prior experience of Asia increasingly are taking Asian courses, often having been introduced to the region through such units. Thus, a book that covers these themes is needed, and the McDougall volume is an appropriate backgrounder for high school and college instructors who teach units on Asia in general world survey courses, as well as for undergraduate students in Asian international relations courses.

As a text that seeks to engage with such a large area of the world, however, the first question must necessarily ask what this text covers and what it does not cover, accompanied by the related question of what approach it