



10-1-1990

### A. L. Basham, ed., *The Civilizations of Monsoon Asia*.

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#### Recommended Citation

Hord, John K. (1990) "A. L. Basham, ed., *The Civilizations of Monsoon Asia*," *Comparative Civilizations Review*: Vol. 23 : No. 23 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol23/iss23/10>

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## A TEXT ON "MONSOON ASIA"

A. L. Basham, ed. *The Civilizations of Monsoon Asia*. New Delhi: S. Chand & Co. (P) Ltd., 1974.

This is a text intended for high school students, not for research scholars. But the high school students involved are Australians, who have been becoming interested in nearby Asia in rather greater depth than is found among Americans. The book will therefore be reviewed as a potential text for an introductory history course at the undergraduate level in America.

The title "monsoon Asia" is somewhat misleading, because the monsoon affects essentially all of coastal and nearby interior Asia from the Indus River to Japan, and this book addresses that entire area. Thus from all of Asia, only the old Muslim areas (Iran and points north and west), Siberia, and Tibet are excluded from consideration. The area covered is divided regionally among five chapters: "South Asia" by S. A. A. Rizvi, "Mainland Southeast Asia" by H. H. E. Loofs, "Indonesia and Malaysia" by Ann Kumar, "China and Korea" by the outstanding scholar of Korea K. H. J. Gardiner, and "Japan" by Alyce Mackerras. There is also an introduction by Basham himself discussing historical and geographic characteristics of the area and its differences from points west. Overall, the coverage is quite good for the depth intended and will be an interesting refresher for anyone not specializing in the area; the person who learns this book will not be able to engage in specialized scholarly conversations, but will be able to listen to them and have a reasonable idea of what is being said.

There are two exceptions. Speaking in general, and even from the point of view of a scholar in constitutional history (whose interest thus focusses on matters political, social, and economic), the coverage of philosophy and literature is abysmal. It seems to be thought adequate merely to mention names and dates of philosophical schools and important books, and by no means all of those; such works as the *San kuo chih yen-i* (translated into English as *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) and the *Sejarah melayu* receive no mention whatever. More specifically, the section on "South Asia" (in effect, India and its neighbors) is very poor on most of Indian history. It covers the Vedic period and the Mughal and modern periods well, and mentions the Mauryans in slight depth. But for the rest of historic times there is little more than a list of dynasties, kings, and wars with almost no accompanying context even to tell what the fighting was about. As a balance, it should be noted that the section "Mainland Southeast Asia" goes to the trouble of specifying some of the frontiers of knowledge of the subject, noting for example that recent scholarship suggests the supposedly Thai kingdom of Nanchao to have been composed largely of Burmans, not Thai. There is no exploration of such points, but even the mention of dispute and change is much more likely to attract a student's interest than is likely for any

catechism of dates and dynasties. Overall, the book is more interesting than most of its type and would be as likely to hold a student's attention as any on the market.

Whether this book should be used as a course text is a question of the nature of the course. For the usual introductory survey "World Civilization I" or somesuch it would be a very good source for this region, albeit preferably with some supplement on literature and philosophy. As a text for a survey course on Asia in particular, its usefulness would depend on the teacher's intent for the course. The course might for example be arranged to give more or less equal coverage to all subregions and subjects, to a group of students who have achieved a level of scholastic competence that one would hope for from high school. In that situation a group of individual studies would probably be better, such as Eberhard's *History of China*, Richardson's *History of Tibet*, J. T. Hall's *Japan*, Daniel Hall's *History of Southeast Asia*, and the Penguin *History of India*, volume I by Romila Thapar, vol. II by Percival Spear, all of them available in paperback. (One would have to settle for readings on Korea.) On the other hand, the students involved may not have achieved a desirable post-high-school level of competence, or the course may be designed only partially for general coverage, to be followed by more detailed study of one particular subject all around the area. In either of those situations this book would be a good text, supplemented by Thapar's *History of India* vol. I because of failings in that area and by those old standbys, *Sources of Indian [Chinese, Japanese] Tradition* for philosophy and literature. In any case this book is recommended for a quick refresher for scholars who would like to have at least a vague acquaintance with the area.

Overall, the book is recommended for the high school and university library and as an introductory text with the above-listed caveats.

John K. Hord

#### A TEXT ON CHINA AND JAPAN: CRITIQUE AND DESIDERATA

Conrad Schirokauer. *A Brief History of Chinese and Japanese Civilization*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1978.

Schirokauer has provided a clearly written text. He has attempted a survey of the politics, art, poetry, literature, religion and philosophy of China and Japan along with some very brief references to Korea and Vietnam. The material on China and on Japan is usually handled in separate chapters, positioned chronologically; a decided advantage if one wishes to focus on but one of the two.

However, several essentials necessary in an introductory survey text are lacking. Any attempt to compress several millenia of history into c.600 pages is a daunting challenge. To provide the reader with a coherent and stimulating presentation requires not only a careful