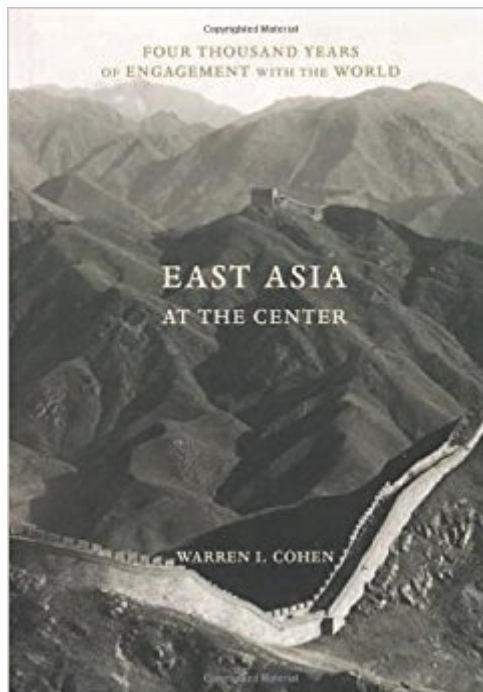


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East Asia At The Center



Synopsis

A common misconception holds that Marco Polo "opened up" a closed and recalcitrant "Orient" to the West. However, this sweeping history covering 4,000 years of international relations from the perspective of China, Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia shows that the region's extensive involvement in world affairs began thousands of years ago. In a time when the writing of history is increasingly specialized, Warren I. Cohen has made a bold move against the grain. In broad but revealing brushstrokes, he paints a huge canvas of East Asia's place in world affairs throughout four millennia. Just as Cohen thinks broadly across time, so too, he defines the boundaries of East Asia liberally, looking beyond China, Japan, and Korea to include Southeast Asia. In addition, Cohen stretches the scope of international relations beyond its usual limitations to consider the vital role of cultural and economic exchanges. Within this vast framework, Cohen explores the system of Chinese domination in the ancient world, the exchanges between East Asia and the Islamic world from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries, and the emergence of a European-defined international system in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The book covers the new imperialism of the 1890s, the Manchurian crisis of the early 1930s, the ascendancy of Japan, the trials of World War II, the drama of the Cold War, and the fleeting "Asian Century" from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s. *East Asia at the Center* is replete with often-overlooked or little-known facts, such as:

- A record of persistent Chinese imperialism in the region
- Tibet's status as a major power from the 7th to the 9th centuries C.E., when it frequently invaded China and decimated Chinese armies
- Japan's profound dependence on Korea for its early cultural development
- The enormous influence of Indian cuisine on that of China
- Egyptian and Ottoman military aid to their Muslim brethren in India and Sumatra against European powers
- Extensive Chinese sea voyages to Arabia and East Africa—long before such famous Westerners as Vasco da Gama and Christopher Columbus took to the seas

East Asia at the Center's expansive historical view puts the trials and advances of the past four millennia into perspective, showing that East Asia has often been preeminent on the world stage—and conjecturing that it might be so again in the not-so-distant future.

Book Information

Paperback: 516 pages

Publisher: Columbia University Press (October 15, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0231101090

ISBN-13: 978-0231101097

Product Dimensions: 6.3 x 1.1 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.6 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #290,033 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #24 in Books > History > Asia > Korea > South #270 in Books > History > Asia > India #450 in Books > History > Asia > Japan

Customer Reviews

Cohen, a prolific and estimable historian of America's relations with Asia, here explores the historical resonances of the modern system. From the prehistoric formation of political units in East Asia a mature international system arose that was centered on the Chinese Han and Tang dynasties, though Central Asia, Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia each rejected or even dominated China at times. This system was successively disrupted by the Mongols, the coming of Islam, the capitalist maritime world system, and the Japanese empire's disastrous attempt to take up the mantle of imperialism from the colonialists. The Cold War and the resurgence of East Asian economic power led to the challenge of the new century. Specialists may quibble that Cohen relies more on narrative than structural analysis or theoretical exploration, but general readers and students of world history will find this stimulating and informative. Recommended for larger public and academic libraries.

Charles W. Hayford, Northwestern Univ., Evanston, IL Copyright 2001
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A superb and readable introduction to the region's history. (Foreign Affairs)Extremely ambitious... Cohen plunges right in with enviable bravado and scope. (China Quarterly)Stimulating and informative. (Library Journal)A detailed, general-reader overview of everything below Siberia and above the Himalayas, plus the offshore archipelagos and the march of Islam. With maps, time-lines and celebrity lists; without partisanship....East Asia at the Center is an intellectual feat. (James H. Bready Baltimore Sun)[Cohen] has attempted the impossible with East Asia at the Center and largely succeeded. His book is an absorbing corrective to the Eurocentric view that dominates most thinking about the world. (The Japan Times)I recommend that all who are curious about or who have a professional interest in East Asia read this book. (Lewis Bernstein Military Review)A successful attempt to provide a useful aid to students in "area studies". (Andrea Campana Acta Koreana)

Good book, helped in my study of China

Mr. Cohen is an able historian. The 400 pages of history flow by effortlessly. One of the most interesting byproducts of such scale is that historic ebb and flow are easily seen. I especially liked how Mr. Cohen broke out different areas, like Japan, to focus on in context of the time being discussed. Take for example the cycles of military might and success, followed by decadence and the loss of territory to other conquerors or to various groups reasserting their independence. Often we're told that nothing lasts forever, it's fascinating to be able to watch it happen over and over. It's also instructive to see the economic cycles. The coastal cities that would flourish with trade, only to be taxed into poverty. Since there was no wealth to support the authorities efforts to tax, piracy would flourish. With the piracy came greater wealth, which again attracted the tax man in an ever-repeating sequence. The awful scale of the murders of millions of people by Tojo, Mao and Pol Pot only seem to be glossed over until one realizes that this same kind of thing has been going on for thousands of years. Individuals in the Eastern cultures have never had the moral importance of those in the West. Unfortunately, Mr. Cohen is not an economist. While his historical reporting and context are excellent, when it comes to modern times the book fails. Mr. Cohen preaches interventionist monetary policy and fiat currency without being aware that the modern economic failures he decries are the result of just such actions by the governments of Asia in the latter half of the 20th century. I would recommend this book to anyone who wants a general background of China and its environment, especially to anyone who was educated in China and wants to know the history that the Party has suppressed in their textbooks.

I've only casually browsed through this book after receiving it a few days ago. Yet an obvious error came up. Mr Cohen repeatedly used the phrase "the Thais of Nanchao (Nanzhao)". It appears that he was unaware that the identification of the medieval semi-Sinicized kingdom of Nanzhao in Yunnan with the ethnic Thais have been already disproved for several decades. The people of Nanzhao were a mixed group, with the ruling class being mainly of the Bai ethnicity. The Bai people speak a Tibeto-Burman language, not a Daic language. I hope that as I read on, there will be no further errors of this kind. I suppose Mr Cohen is more of an expert on modern history.

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