

## BOOK REVIEWS

you and I, having been abandoned, are persons of no account. . . . Everyone accuses you of being illegitimate, and people look down on me as a widow. My suffering brings only tears. How can I continue to live?" (p. 97) According to another text, when the Buddha does visit her, he instructs his disciples to allow Yaśodharā to greet him in whatever manner she chooses. He understands her suffering even though beyond it himself. Such tales allow us to know the Buddha, his disciples, and his family as people like ourselves, even twenty-five centuries later.

When presenting the former lives of the Buddha as told in the *jataka* tales, the author again presents a more balanced image of the Buddha-to-be. Although the most familiar jatakas portray him as a saint, Strong narrates less familiar jatakas in which the bodhisattva commits evil deeds and generates the karma that propels him into subsequent rebirths. Subject to desire and anger, this human Buddha-to-be reflects basic human struggles. To grasp the significance of the Buddha's life as teaching, it is essential to know him as a human being before seeing him as the invincible Enlightened One. By identifying the Buddha as completely human, these narratives describe a man who offers the possibility of awakening to all beings. For students and scholars who want to pursue a particular text or teaching in more depth, Strong provides an extensive section of "Sources and Further Reading," as well as a helpful glossary of Sanskrit names and terms, and a general bibliography. Also useful are the tables summarizing several of the lists popular in the Indian Buddhist tradition, such as the thirty-two marks of the great man, the forty-five locations of the Buddha's rain retreats, and the Buddha's negative karma as found in specific jatakas.

Telling the tales as a good storyteller, Strong presents primary source narratives that capture the simplicity and depth of the life of the Buddha. An excellent resource for undergraduate students, as well as some high school students, *The Buddha* by John Strong retains the nuanced complexity of the mythological dimension, the humanness of the personal, and the intellectual acumen of the philosophical. ■

CATHY BENTON has taught Asian Religion and Literature for seventeen years at Lake Forest College. Her research interests include Indian religious story literature in the Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim communities in India. Her book, *God of Desire, Tales of Kamadeva in Sanskrit Story Literature*, will be published by SUNY Press in 2005.

## Asian Cultural Traditions

BY CAROLYN BROWN HEINZ

PROSPECT HEIGHTS, ILL.: WAVELAND PRESS, 1999  
416 PAGES, PAPERBACK: ISBN 57766-043-9


After nearly two decades of research on Asia, I was surprised to find a book that offered a truly new approach to teaching Asia: Carolyn Brown Heinz's *Asian Cultural Traditions*. While there are many excellent books on individual Asian countries, books that treat all of Asia are relatively uncommon. This is understandable since covering all of Asia in a single book is a daunting task given Asia's diversity. Various authors cope with this by simplistic overviews or leaving large gaps by focusing on aspects of Asia familiar to them. While these are useful and informative, I have been vaguely dissatisfied—particularly for teaching—because the end result has been jumbled. Brown avoids the fallacy of finding a unity in Asia (or "The Orient") that does not exist, as many writers did in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Brown points out that she is not intent on covering countries one at a time. Indeed, she reminds us that the current legal boundaries of all Asian nation states (with the single possible exception of Japan) did not exist one hundred years ago.

Using a truly novel interdisciplinary approach, Brown tells us she organizes her book about "all of Asia" around a number of major themes.

First, Brown considers Asia spatially and deals with its underlying geography, focusing on the importance of the geological movement of the South Asian (or Indian) subcontinent from the coast of Africa to Asia. Not only did this create the world's highest mountains (the Himalayas and Tibetan plateau), it also created the river valleys that drain the southern portion of East Asia.

Second, she considers Asia in terms of cultural evolution. Recognizing that Chinese and Indian civilizations are the two main




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dominant cultures in Asia, she points out the cultural impact of each civilization on their neighbors. This was not necessarily positive. Linguistically, Japan might have been better served if it borrowed its written language from India since India and Japan both have polysyllabic languages. Southeast Asian countries might have been better off, had they borrowed their written language from China since at least some Southeast Asian countries have monosyllabic languages as do the Chinese. The natural diversity of languages is thereby further complicated. This conclusion flows naturally into her third major theme in which she examines Asia linguistically. Through an appropriate use of charts, maps, and text, she explains Asia's linguistic diversity better than any other account of which I am aware.

All themes are well crafted for use in the classroom. I was impressed with the text, and was surprised and delighted with the success I encountered using it in the classroom. I suspect Brown's approach may alter the way Asian culture is taught. Even if I'm wrong about this, Brown has contributed an important interdisciplinary book for use as a supplement to a wide variety of historical, political science, and anthropology classes in colleges. The author has incorporated more than sixty maps, charts, and photos (black and white) to enliven the text and support its usefulness as a text. Those interested in tying the language questions to the cultural, social, and anthropological issues will appreciate the series of tables explaining the degree to which Asian languages compare and contrast with one another. "Boxed readings" in each chapter support its pedagogical function. A few changes may be helpful in future editions. Some of the material included in the chapter endnotes would probably be better if included directly in the text, and more attention should be paid to making sure the place names are fully and properly identified. Despite clear attempts to make it easy for students to use, some facts known to specialists may be unfamiliar to college students. Overall, I found Heinz's work commendable. ■

**RICHARD L. WILSON** is a Professor of Political Science at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and formerly a Fulbright Professor at Peking University and Foreign Affairs University, both in Beijing. He is the author of *American Political Leaders* (Facts on File, 2002), *Encyclopedia of the U.S. Supreme Court* (Salem, 2001), *Censorship* (Salem, 1997), *American Government* (Harcourt Brace, 1995). Wilson's works have three times received the Outstanding Reference Award from the American Library Association, and his works have also received the "Highly Recommended" Choice Award from the American Library Association's Association of College and Research Libraries. Wilson is a senior teaching consultant for EAFI, an organization sponsoring English-Chinese language teaching exchanges with the People's Republic of China.

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