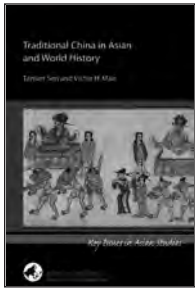


Three New Volumes: *Key Issues in Asian Studies*

Editor's note: *Key Issues in Asian Studies* (KIAS) is a series of booklets engaging major cultural and historical themes in the Asian experience. KIAS booklets serve as vital educational materials that are both accessible and affordable for classroom use. This series is particularly intended for teachers and undergraduates at two- and four-year colleges as well as high school students and secondary school teachers engaged in teaching Asian studies in a comparative framework. What follows are brief descriptive author essays of the three new KIAS booklets, *Traditional China in Asian and World History*, *Korea in World History*, and *Zen Past and Present*. For further information or to order copies of "Key Issues" booklets, please visit www.asian-studies.org/publications/KIAS.htm.

Traditional China in Asian and World History

By Tansen Sen and Victor H. Mair



Traditional China in Asian and World History demonstrates the importance of cross-cultural interactions in shaping Chinese history from the earliest times to the middle of the fifteenth century. Our aim in writing this book is to show how the cross-cultural linkages established by traders, missionaries, immigrants, military, and diplomatic missions and travelers transformed Chinese society in fundamental ways. The work focuses on five aspects of traditional China's interactions with the neighboring societies and foreign polities.

First, it examines the different types of records that the Chinese produced on foreign peoples and societies. Specifically, we attempt to illustrate the diverse views of non-Chinese people in these sources. There were the records of the court historians, who, writing from a Confucian perspective, asserted the superiority of Chinese culture. Chinese Buddhists, on the other hand, described India, which they viewed as a holy land, as an equally sophisticated society. And, finally, the later notices by coastal officials focused on the trading activities and the flora and fauna of foreign lands. Selections from three such sources are provided in the appendix to the volume.

Second, the book explores the role of nomadic tribes in transmitting technological knowledge and other practices to China. Bronze, chariots, and equestrian arts and equipment were such examples of early foreign transmissions to China. They are important evidence for contacts between the Central Plains of China and the neighboring societies dating back to at least the beginning of the second millennium BCE.

The third issue highlighted in the book deals with the interactions along the mainland and sea routes that linked the Chinese dynasties to foreign markets and cities. Popularly known as the Silk Roads or Silk Routes, these networks not only facilitated the movement of trade goods but also enabled the spread of religious ideas and texts. The transmission of Buddhism and its impact on Chinese society during much of the first millennium CE is the fourth important topic. Not only did the acceptance of the Buddhist doctrine by the Chinese during the Han dynasty drastically transform the social and cultural lives of the people living in the Central Plains, it also created unique linkages among kingdoms and societies extending from present-day Iran to Japan.

The final topic focuses on the emergence of China as a major participant in cross-cultural commerce from the tenth to the mid-fifteenth centuries. It analyzes the changes in economic policies that influenced global trade during the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties. Foreign trade during these three dynasties was significantly different from previous periods: bulk products, instead of luxury items, formed a major component of goods exchanged; traders and ships from China vigorously engaged in commercial activity overseas; and the profit from overseas commerce became an integral part of state revenue.

We believe that the discussion of these topics is not only important for understanding the dynamic and multifaceted history of China, but also for comprehending the connected and interlinked history of Asia and the world before European colonization. In the case of Chinese civilization, especially in its early phase, it is crucial that students challenge the view that ancient China existed in isolation with little or no influence from and interaction with other regions of the world. This book is part of the growing literature that has stressed this key issue in studying Chinese history. ■



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VICTOR H. MAIR is Professor of Chinese Language and Literature at the University of Pennsylvania. He is a specialist on medieval vernacular Buddhist literature and, for the last two decades, has led an international team of scholars and archeologists investigating the Bronze Age and early Iron Age mummies of the Tarim Basin.

Korea in World History

By Donald N. Clark



Korea in World History introduces the Korean people and the circumstances that have shaped their nation. The Republic of Korea (South Korea) is a world economic power. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) is widely regarded as a failed socialist state and a threat to its neighbors. Koreans overseas constitute significant emigré communities that contribute to their new homelands, including the United States. The world needs to know Korea better, and this brief book makes it accessible to general readers.

One circumstance of Korea's story is its location surrounded by stronger neighbors. The survival of Korean culture—language, customs, folkways, and social norms—is itself a remarkable story. In terms of East Asian history, it represents the survival of the local "small tradition" alongside the Chinese-style "great tradition," which is also an important part of Korean life. The co-existence of these two traditions in one culture is one important feature of Korea's position in world history. This is a main theme of the historical chapters that covers the emergence of Korea's ancient kingdoms and the development of a dynastic pattern through the end of the nineteenth century. Chapters on modern Korea present the two ordeals that the country underwent in the twentieth century: Japanese colonial rule between 1910 and 1945, and the division of Korea into north and south following World War II.

Korea in World History argues that much of the conflict between the communist north and the democratic-capitalist south is rooted in the

legacy of Japanese colonial rule. Though most Koreans wanted to oust the Japanese, they did not agree on the post-independence vision for their country. Some wanted the arrangements for wealth and power within Korea to remain privately owned. Others wanted to see a social and economic revolution that would redistribute wealth and power. The Cold War fostered the two regimes that represented these opposing points of view, and the tragedy of Korea is the inability of these two visions to reconcile.

For three years during the Korean War (1950-53), the United Nations, opposed by communist forces, tried to settle the conflict between the Korean north and south, to no avail. The country remained divided and devastated after the 1953 armistice. In the last part of the book, I discuss how the two sides fared under their separate regimes. After years of dictatorship, the south emerged as a viable democracy and an economic success, due mainly to the labors and sacrifices of two generations of Koreans striving to make a better life for their children. The north, though initially more successful, eventually fell victim to poor planning and maladministration. By the 1990s, after the fall of communism in Europe, North Korea was suffering chronic failures in agriculture and industrial production. The regime's response was to gather its remaining resources and to spur its people to greater sacrifices and efforts to support the system while viewing outsiders with fear and suspicion, resorting to nuclear threats to preserve its system.

The book ends with the question of how long the elite ruling class of North Korea can maintain its people in this state of isolation and anxiety, postponing inevitable change. ■



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Zen Past and Present

By Eric Cunningham



Zen is one of those topics that manages to capture the fascination of everybody who hears about it, yet, in my experience, few people outside the worlds of Japanese or religious studies have a particularly solid grasp on what it actually means. When I tell people my area of specialty, they usually respond by telling me how interesting they think Zen is—then they follow up by asking “what exactly is Zen?” The problem with a question like this is that—Zen being as “beyond words and description” as it is—there is no good or easy answer to it. *Zen Past and Present* is specifically designed to answer the question “What is Zen” as concisely as possible while at the same time recognizing the complexity and richness that the term Zen connotes.

The book grew out of my own notes from a class called “Zen, Modernity, and the Counterculture” that I’ve been teaching for ten years. What I try to do in this booklet is provide a historical survey of Zen Buddhism that begins with the Buddha himself and traces the traditions and practices of Zen all the way into the present day. The approach I have taken allows me to discuss Zen from a wide range of disciplinary standpoints, which makes *Zen Past and Present* appropriate for classes in world and comparative religion, history, literature, culture, and even art.

Among the more useful features of this booklet is the emphasis I have placed upon Zen in the modern world. Students will enjoy seeing the degree to which this once “exotic” Eastern religion has influenced and been influenced by modernity and will come away from this booklet with a greater ability to discuss the critical issue of how “traditional” thought systems assimilate into the modern environment. At a time when all teachers are trying to formulate creative and appropriate ways to broaden the multicultural scope of their classes, the story of how Zen became modernized provides insight into the promises and potential pitfalls of blending the philosophical and religious worldviews of diverse cultures.

While I have tried to preserve the humor, mystery, and paradoxical delight of “essential” Zen, I have also been careful not to reinforce outdated tropes and stereotypes. *Zen Past and Present* “problematizes” such things as the links between Zen and the Japanese imperial army in World War II; the strange association between Zen and the psychedelic community in the 1950s and 1960s; and the often “phony” spirituality of “bourgeois” and “punk” Zen of the late twentieth century. The critically thinking student will find as much to chew on in this booklet as the student merely seeking to absorb new information about world culture.

I am grateful to Lucien Ellington, KIAS editor and Jon Wilson, AAS Publications Coordinator, for giving me an opportunity to share this topic, which I have long loved, with a new generation of potential Zen scholars! ■



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