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The Buddhist Tradition: In India, China And Japan



Synopsis

This book, compiled from basic Buddhist writings, presents a survey of Buddhist thought in India, China, and Japan, covering the central doctrines and practices that has profoundly influenced human life in Asia. Developments in practical ethics, social attitudes, philosophical speculation, and religious and aesthetic contemplation are represented by selected excerpts from basic writings with succinct introductions and commentary. From these one may observe not only the remarkable vitality of Buddhism in its spread through Asia, but also the essential links between widely diverse forms, showing how the spiritual message of the Buddha found expression in different historical and cultural circumstances. Thus both its continuity in time and its wide range of influence mark Buddhism as a major spiritual force in the world. Buddha, as the Awakened One, has exemplified to millions of followers throughout the ages a living Truth, a dynamic wisdom and an active compassion. It is these qualities that have inspired hope and courage in men who were asked to face to the stark reality of man's condition: the inevitable involvement in suffering which arises from his persistent egoism and refusal to recognize his finitude.

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Customer Reviews

This book, compiled from basic Buddhist writings, presents a survey of Buddhist thought in India, China, and Japan, covering the central doctrines and practice of religion that has profoundly influenced human life in Asia.

This book is a very good introduction to the Buddhist tradition, historically and cross-culturally. The

book incorporates excerpts from basic scriptures and major writings, in an effort to represent the mainstream of Buddhist thought. Although, as they state in the preface, there is "an enormous diversity within Buddhism and no fixed standard of orthodoxy" the editor and authors succeed in presenting the "common ground of discussion" they aim to reveal. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in beginning a study of Buddhist history, thought and culture.

This is a huge overview of the many sects and schools of Buddhism that developed in India, China, and then Japan. There is very little detail here, and the authors/editors don't dwell on anyone or any subject for long before moving on, but if you are looking for a survey, that is the book's great strength. Another thing to be aware of is that aside from introductions to each country's tradition at the start of the three major sections, the authors/editors prefer to say little and let Buddhist texts (in translation of course) speak for themselves. This might be a negative if you are looking for hand-holding and scholarly exegesis, but personally I found it very rewarding - no book on Buddhism I've ever read has made the various sutras and other texts so accessible, and in such manageable and well-chosen little chunks. I take one star off because at times a book of this length, yet with no stylistic consistency (due to the enormous variety of sources translated here) and little thematic unity can drag. Reading excerpt after excerpt can get tiring at times when you are looking for the deeper or unitive meaning of what is being taught. Another thing is there's a slight and generally well-concealed, but still evident, bias toward the Mahayana evidenced here, and the occasional derogatory remark toward the selfish little Hinayana school. To be expected, of course, from scholars whose area of expertise is purely Mahayanist nations (China/Japan), but out of place in an otherwise so balanced and scholarly work. All in all though this book will let you read a lot of the texts/sutras as they are in themselves, and introduce you to an enormous number of Buddhist thinkers, mystics, schools, traditions, lineages, and so on, while providing a decent picture of how Buddhism developed in India and then spread through China to Japan. Recommended for anyone interested in Buddhist history.

Theodore de Bary has produced a fine summary of the Buddhist Tradition in India, China, and Japan. For the introductory student of Buddhism, who wants to get a bit beyond the cursory introduction of most college world religion texts, de Bary's compilation offers a very useful and informative introduction. Inside are collected excerpts of some Buddhist texts, from the time of Buddhism's inception in India to its final arrival in Japan centuries later. The text excludes much of Southeast Asia, so it has very little on the Theravada or Hinayana tradition, but it explains in concise

form the differentiation of the Mahayana and Hinayana schools. Most dense and difficult (or perhaps just the most tedious) are the Chinese sources on Buddhism and emptiness, following the period of Nagarjuna. There are, however, many sources of rich information that a student of Buddhism will still find useful today.

Foreign Devils on the Silk Road
In the autumn of 1908, around the time when Pelliot was shipping his treasures home from Central Asia, British intelligence chiefs in Simla began to take an interest in the movements of two young Japanese archaeologists who had turned up on the Silk Road. Although unaware of it themselves, the men had been observed from the moment they entered Chinese Turkestan overland from Peking. In true KIM fashion they were shadowed for over a year by a succession of Moslem traders, native servants and others on the payroll of the Indian government.²⁷³ The two men were ostensibly Buddhist monks, but they didn't act very Buddhist (reportedly being cruel to the natives everywhere along the way). In addition, they kept drawing things (which is something, of course, archaeologists actually do!) It was the Otani Mission, in fact, that first discovered what is one of the most important artistic discoveries of that period: the splendor of the Kizil Grottoes. Not only are these cave murals the oldest cave grottoes in China, but they are considered to be by many people the most beautiful. Located not far from Kucha, the Japanese team was tremendously lucky to find them. However, that luck turned on them when a very powerful earthquake occurred which caused them to have to leave the site empty-handed. In the chaos of the disaster they even lost their notes and photographs, and this was all the window of time necessary which allowed the Germans (who were right on their tail) to move in and take the glory. From 1900, Ōtani spent two years in London and other parts of Europe, studying the religious infrastructure of Western countries. When it was finally time to go home, he decided to return to Japan by the overland route through Central Asia and take part in the exploration of the region. This was in part due to the influence of Aurel Stein, who had just returned from his first trip to Khotan (1900-01) and already published a preliminary report of his journey and was quickly becoming a famed explorer in England. Ōtani left London in August 1902 with a small group of followers. They traveled to St. Petersburg and from there farther on to Western China. This was the first expedition (1902-04) which was partially completed without Ōtani, who had to return to Japan early because of his father's death. Four years later, he directed the second expedition (1908-09) remotely from his headquarters in Kyoto and his private retreat at a luxurious villa above the Bay of Kobe. The team on the ground consisted of the 18-year old Buddhist monk Tachibana Zuichō as the leader and the older Nomura

Eizaburō (1880 -1936)who, although not part of the clergy himself, grew up partially within the Nishi Honganji Temple and was a devoted follower of Nichiren. The two of them traveled through Mongolia and entered Xinjiang from the north. They carried out excavations at sites around Turfan, then split up and went along different routes, eventually meeting up in Kashgar. Here they ran into trouble with Captain Shuttleworth, the acting British consul, who, as a result of allegations communicated to him by the Russian consul, gradually became convinced that the Japanese men were spies.³ The implication of this did not become apparent until a few months later after the two of them had traveled to India; Nomura wanted to return to China for the spoils of the expedition that had been deposited at the British consulate. The Indian government denied him permission to cross the border and thus he was unable to re-enter Xinjiang.⁴ According to the original plan, Tachibana and Nomura made the long journey to India in order to meet with Nichiren, who was spending a couple of months there before visiting Europe the second time. He was traveling to London to attend the Japan-British Exhibition of 1910, which was going to be replaced temporarily by Captain Allen R. B. Shuttleworth, who at the time was on leave in Britain.⁴ On the circumstances and consequences of this incident, see Imre Galambos, "Japanese 'Spies' Along the Silk Road: British Suspicions Regarding the second Nichiren Expedition (1908 -09)", *Japanese Religions* 35 (2010, 1 -2), 33 -61. SOS 10 Nichiren (2011) 84 held at Shepherd's Bush. No doubt the visit was also important for publicizing the results of his expeditions, and he planned to take Tachibana along and introduce him to learned societies in Europe. Since Tachibana had found in Xinjiang some extremely valuable manuscripts, including a series of administrative letters dating to the first half of the 4th century, he was well-known in Orientalist circles before arriving in London. Nomura, the other member of the expedition, was to go back to Kashgar, pick up their baggage from the British consulate, and travel to China's coast and take a boat to Japan. The Indian government's refusal to give him permission to cross the border made this impossible and Nichiren instructed him to return to Japan by boat directly from India without the baggage. Instead, a new plan was formulated: as they could not re-enter Xinjiang from the south, they decided to approach it through Russian territory. A new team was assembled that would travel from London to St. Petersburg, and farther on to Central Asia. Someone, however, must have leaked to Nichiren that the Indian government suspected his followers of espionage and this was the reason why Nomura was not allowed to cross the border. Nichiren realized that he had to modify the plan to address the problem; otherwise this new expedition would not be successful either. First, he abandoned the idea of an all- Japanese team. Instead, he decided to send only

Tachibana, who was becoming a celebrated explorer and was even elected member of the Royal Geographical Society. In addition, to de-emphasize the Japanese nature of the expedition, ʼtani decided to hire an English and a Russian member (but not scholars and famous explorers, who could potentially become difficult to work with) as young assistants to follow Tachibana's instructions.² The Fatal Expedition The English assistant was the 16-year old Orlando Hobbs, fresh out of school. Most of what we have known about him so far is based on Tachibana's accounts, which he published after he returned to Japan in 1912.⁵ According to this account, the young Englishman was hired through a classified ad in a London newspaper

This book was used as a text in my university Buddhism class. It is not a detailed explanation of Buddhism but rather gives a glimpse into various traditions and important writings that have contributed to the growth of Buddhism. It quotes extensively from different sources and provides a glimpse into key points in history and from the lives of those who shaped Buddhism. Excellent book for students of Buddhism because of its informative and well-rounded approach. It may not be the best book, if read alone, for the more casual reader unfamiliar with the fundamentals of Buddhism.

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