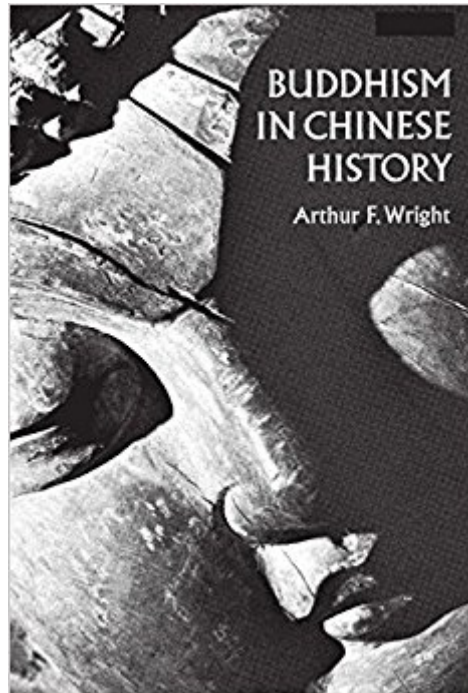




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Buddhism In Chinese History



Synopsis

One of the great themes in the history of Eastern Asia is the transformation of Chinese culture by Buddhism. This process can be traced across nearly two millennia and can be seen at work in almost every aspect of Chinese life and thought. This study was undertaken with the object of showing how Buddhism has influenced Chinese culture, and in the hope that it may provide some insight into the role of the religion as a carrier of elements from one great civilization into another. It also deals with the interesting question of the nature of Buddhism as a world religion, and of the ways in which it resembles or differs from the other great faiths.

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Customer Reviews

"The picture that emerges should not only be of great interest to students of Chinese history, of religion, and of cultural interaction, but may also throw light on the renewed process of borrowing and adaptation taking place in China today. Despite the formidable scope and complexity of Professor Wright's subject, he succeeds in handling it with masterly succinctness, lucidity, and insight." —Derk Bodde, *The Annals* "Professor Wright's masterly and readable book . . . [signals] the directions towards a genuine history of Chinese Buddhism. For some time to come, this book will furnish both specialists and lay inquirers with their clearest frame of reference." —Richard H. Robinson, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* "A sound, well-balanced, and well-written account of the present state of knowledge and opinion which can be read with pleasure and profit by the general reader and at the same time provides a synthesis from which further investigation can proceed." *The Times Literary Supplement*

This is one of the books on the required reading list for our course at Hong Kong University on Chinese Buddhism and I would like to strongly recommend this book as a very good short introduction to the topic. The course I am taking has the distinction of being taught in both English and Chinese with reams of reading in both languages. Having read the book and much of the supplementary reading, I have to say how well this book has held up in light of the latest findings with regards to its broad arguments especially for the early chapters, despite having been written in 1959. The chapter setting out the background for early Buddhism is especially good at setting out the background of the Han Dynasty and the role of Confucianism and Taoism. The other strength of the book is that the style is elegant and punchy (perhaps because they were originally designed as lectures) as opposed to the bland uniform academic analysis that characterizes so many books nowadays and the over proliferation of footnotes. Reading some of the modern papers makes my head spin with the hundreds of names of monks and monasteries and references, such that the key arguments and trends are sometimes lost in the detail. I do miss the days when style was just as important as content and I value this as a teaching tool in improving my own writing. On the flip side, for a modern reader, there are references to thinkers and historians who are no longer in vogue, such as Toynbee, Satre and Maspero, and he makes pointed comparisons to the role of Christianity in Rome, but if you have an acquaintance with their work and of Roman history, these references are very illuminating and helps one look at the history from another aspect. I have to agree that the part on Modern China is dated, but that is the danger of most books which deal with modern China and really if we are looking at Chinese Buddhism the key developments happened much much earlier so this is not a big loss. There are so many books now that seek to explain the megatrends of China that date in one or two years. This book has at least stood the test of half a century.

This book is pretty cheap for all of the knowledge it gives. I love learning, and knowledge is priceless. This book is great.

These 6 lectures are based on the author's "reflective interpretation" of Chinese history. Yes, there are pregnant observations on the impact of Buddhism on Chinese history, but this is not a straightforward survey of Chinese history, such as found in Kenneth Chen's "Buddhism in China a Historical Survey". This book is not for freshman students of Chinese history. Advanced students, perhaps, but one needs to balance these views expressed in 1959 with current thinking.

"Buddhism in Chinese History" is a collection of six lectures presented at the University of Chicago by Arthur F. Wright in the late 1950's. Wright offers up an attempt at reflective interpretation of the study of Chinese Buddhism, which explains how Buddhism played an important role in reducing the cultural and institutional differences that existed in China during the 6th century A.D. and laid the foundations for the unified, and eventually Confucian, society that would ultimately exist. Wright's analysis extends all the way from the Han China of 206 B.C. to the Modern Era, where Buddhism continues to have strong influences in China. Specifically, Wright looks at elements of thought, language and culture that have been so completely appropriated that their origins have been essentially forgotten. Indeed, you can imagine what position the Chinese Communist government would have on Wright's views, especially given Wright's claim that there is a self-conscious effort by the Chinese to identify, reinterpret and use elements of the country's Buddhist heritage to solve the problems China's traditional civilization faces when confronted with the dominating forces of the West. Whether you come to this volume because of an interest in the religion of Buddhism or the cultural history of China, you will certainly find Wright's arguments to be of interest.

one might wonder what relevance a book written in the late fifties could possibly have to the China of today. then, communism was consolidating its grip on the country, today it seems to be losing it. in fact, Wright points to similarities between the Buddhist and Marxist influence. he cites the Chinese willingness to give enthusiastic support to an idea which suggests that we look carefully at the ideology developing in China today. he debunks the notion that China merely absorbs outside influences by pointing to the incredible changes that Buddhism affected in China. perhaps most importantly, he reminds us that periods of disruption have been the time when the Chinese have seemed most responsive to alien ideas. Read Wright and stay tuned. Lynn Hoffman, author of The New Short Course in Wine

This little book provides a good overview of, as the title suggests, Buddhism in China. It delves into relevant and fascinating exploration of how Buddhism changed in its adoption of Chinese culture and values. Where this book really shines is the section on neo-Confucianism, and how the two blended together. Good, insightful read. Perfectly fine for someone not too familiar with the topic (such as myself.) 4 stars for the plates not being all that well explained, as the book fails to explain the changes in the Buddhist art that it has pictures of.

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