

stated, often ironically witty. Views bound feet as art and fetish. Shows the complicity of women in the perpetuation of their subordinate status, symbolized by their deformed feet, ironically perceived as reformed feet and as the basis of female agency and empowerment.

Ariyoshi, Sawako, *The Doctor's Wife*, Wakako Hiro-naka and Ann Siller Kostant (trans), Tokyo and New York: Kodansha International, 1978, 184 pp, \$9, pb

Novel about a doctor in late Tokugawa era who experiments on his wife. Modeled on an actual historical figure.

## *USING RELIGION TO TEACH ABOUT ASIA*

### *1996 ASIANetwork CONFERENCE PANEL SYNOPSIS*

Miyako Matsuki, Panel Chair  
Religion, Gettysburg College

How does one teach about the religions of Asia to undergraduates? Professors who are specialists in Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, or Shinto have faced this question many times. At the ASIANetwork Conference, the issue was phrased in a different way in a panel presentation entitled, "Using Religion to Teach about Asia."

**Carol S. Anderson, Kalamazoo College**  
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A student once described my course on Chinese religious traditions: "Think of it this way. If Chinese religions are like a flower, we've studied the stamen, the petals, the stem and the roots, but not the essence of the flower itself."

I have found this analogy useful in thinking about how we teach the religions of China, Japan, and South Asia. With this analogy, this student revealed her expectation that in the course she would learn something of "Chinese spirituality." Spirituality, students explain, is the essence of religion, and I have found that students dismiss the institutional forms of a religious tradition in favor of what they understand the spiritual forms to be.

The assumption that "spirituality" may be separated from the structure of a religious tradition is a common one among students at Kalamazoo College. They are not necessarily engaged in a personal religious search, but they seek to grasp, comprehend, and digest the inner religious experience of others.

Teaching a course on Chinese or Japanese religions or on Buddhism in South Asia is thus as much an exercise in hermeneutics as in teaching the substantive issues. As we read the early myths of the *Nihongi*, for example, we discuss the unar-

ticulated assumptions about religion and spirituality that students bring to the class. We attempt to see the complex and intricate dance between myths, histories, symbols, rituals, and sacred texts that lies at the heart of any religion. Ideally, students learn through a course on Asian religious traditions that their initial expectations require reshaping. As one student put it on the last day of class, "Maybe our search for Chinese spirituality is mostly a product of our own culture."

**Cathy Benton, Lake Forest College**  
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I am interested in the pedagogical issues that emerge when using story literature as a window into the Indian religious tradition. Stories teach the world view and ethos of the tradition in small "nutshells." My job as the teacher is to help students understand the broader context which the stories highlight.

One of the challenges of this approach is finding good translations which are faithful to the original languages, but are also accessible to students. Once the texts have been chosen, my role as guide is twofold: first, to provide the right balance of contextual background in the Indian tradition without destroying the opportunity to discover the tale's teachings in the words of the narrative itself, and second, to guide students in examining the implicit assumptions and value judgments inherent in the form and content of the stories.

Using traditional stories as a way to draw students in works well because students begin to learn the religious tradition from the inside out, rather than from the "outside" in as they do when simply reading secondary sources.

I like structuring the class this way because it parallels traditional ways of teaching/learning, and because students consistently respond with openness, humor, fascination, and curiosity to learn.

**Christopher Ives, University of Puget Sound**  
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While providing an excellent entry into broader undergraduate examination of Japanese culture, courses on Japanese religion run the risk of suffering from the reification, essentialism, and exceptionalism that characterize much of the discourse about Japanese religion and culture.

Many works on Japan tend to reify the various facets of traditional Japanese religious life as separate "isms," such as Buddhism, Shintoism, and Confucianism, even though such compartmentalization derives less from historical Japanese religious life in its concrete specificity than from factors in Meiji Japan and categories in Religious Studies.

In a different direction, certain works contribute to the reification and essentialism reflected in representations of "the Japanese spirit" or "the Japanese world view" and in arguments by such figures as D.T. Suzuki that Zen has so permeated Japanese culture that it is now the master key necessary for unlocking phenomena as diverse as swordsmanship and landscape gardening. As readers of this newsletter know, this essentialism has contributed to hackneyed claims about the uniqueness of Japanese culture and to misty and mystifying introductions to Japan that overflow with references to *haiku* and cherry blossoms.

Rather than being a curse, however, these issues can constitute a pedagogical blessing, for they provide an opportunity to consider with students how Japanese culture consists not only of an array of values and practices, but also of a set of self-reflections on "Japanese culture."

**Raj Thiruvengadam, Simmons College**  
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An intriguing challenge in teaching about Asian religions in an American context is negotiating a border between the familiar and satisfying, "but misleading," and the exotic and fascinating, "but seemingly unthinkable."

The concept of reincarnation is a good example of the movement from the banal to the bizarre. Students' popular notion of reincarnation is that it is a way to live forever. This they like. But it is disconcerting and thought-provoking to learn that in Asia the cycle of rebirth is that from which one seeks liberation. Living forever is the problem.

Faced with such unfamiliar ways of thinking and valuing, some students "shut down" by becoming reactionary and passing off such ideas and values as simply wrong and backward. So it is necessary to tip them back over the border in the other direction, making the foreign more familiar. For example, the Shinto "*kami dana*" altar can be compared with the mantle piece above the American fireplace since both are places where meaningful family mementos are placed.

Or one may liken the Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses or the Buddhist pantheon of *bodhisattvas* to the Catholic saints and martyrs. By whatever methods, the aim remains the same: finding this border for each student and keeping them focused (even if a little "tipsy") on the movement across it.

**Miyako Matsuki, Gettysburg College**  
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As a native of Japan, I have a special concern when teaching a course on the religions of Japan. Am I too subjective, emotional, and biased? Can I present the subject as "purely" academic material? Where do I begin?

I use textual studies in the course and expect students to read as many original texts, in English translation, as possible. Besides the *Analects* of Confucius and the *Tao Te Ching*, which influenced the Japanese through the ages, and some Buddhist *sutra* texts, I find *Japanese Religions Past and Present* (Ian Reader, E. Anreasen and F. Stefansson) very helpful. The latter includes Shinto myths, Norito, material from *Kojiki* and other historical documents and religious writings.

Videos such as *Shinto* and *The Yamaguchi Family* are effective. In order that the students *feel* the culture, I tell fairy tales such as *Momo-taro*, *Kaguya-hime*, *Hana-saka-jijii*, and even *Saru-kani-gassen* (a fight between Monkey and Crab). I also teach some *kanji* to encourage the students to study the accessible picture language of the Far East. I include personal recollections: how I lit sticks of incense for departed grandfathers and brothers who died so young, discussed current events with visiting Shinto priests, and washed the grave stones and cleaned the area of a Buddhist temple.

If students grasp the inclusive character of Asian religious culture and how deeply daily life and religious beliefs are intertwined in Asia, then the path to comprehend another culture has a healthy beginning. Above all, I like to see the students grow more interested in Asian cultural traditions.