

Encyclopedia of Buddhism

Damien Keown and Charles S. Prebish, eds. *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. London: Routledge, 2007. 923 pp. \$260.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780415314145.

The editors of *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* set out an ambitious aim for their book; “The editors hope it will become an indispensable tool for students, teachers, and researchers from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, as well as to the general reader” (ix). They acknowledge the lack of a single-volume reference book that is all-encompassing on the topic of Buddhism and point to the growth of interest in Buddhism over the last fifty years as reasons for the need for a work that can provide students and scholars with all that they need to know about Buddhism. While stating that the topic is vast, they set out their aim to provide a single volume that can cover a large scope and that is “scholarly but readable” (ix) for almost all readers.

A strength of this book is its user-friendly layout. Along with the usual introduction and acknowledgements, the editors include a very helpful section instructing readers on use of this encyclopedia. Also present is a list of illustrations, a pronunciation guide, a chronology of Buddhism, a list of A-Z entries, and a list of entries by major topic. All of this serves as an introduction to the A-Z entries of the book. The book is divided into two main sections: an A-Z entry list and a second section that groups by major topics. This provides the reader with a listing of all of the entry titles for a given area of interest, such as Buddhist canons and literature or sacred places in Buddhism. This allows a reader, for example, to follow the path from the origins of Buddhism in Northern India as it traveled east and chart how it was met and assimilated into local cultures in China, Korea, and Japan. This feature will be particularly useful to those unacquainted with Buddhism. The pronunciation guide is also very helpful. This encyclopedia covers Buddhist topics from a variety of countries and regions that represent many languages. The pronunciation guide provides the reader with tips for pronouncing Sanskrit, the language of many of the primary Buddhist texts, as well as Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Pali, and Tibetan.

The entries in the encyclopedia were penned by some of the top scholars in the field of Buddhist studies. They treat a variety of topics that is impressive for a single volume. The depth of information that is provided in the main entries is appropriate. Also included is a generous list of further readings along with references and a guide to Buddhist scriptures.

The editors have done a nice job of allowing the individual author’s entries to have their own voice, yet still remain cohesive. While the authors vary in writing style and presentation of information, the overall work is even in its delivery and coverage. The material is presented as follows: 25 percent of the book is devoted to major topics, comprised of 5,000-word entries; 30 percent discusses significant persons, canons, texts, and literature, with entries comprised of around 1,500 words; and 30 percent covers important concepts, ideas, rituals, customs, sacred places and diaspora, in entries of about 1,000 words. The remainder of the book consists of 500-word entries that cover miscellaneous topics. The contributors provide pertinent information on a variety of topics such as major figures in the Buddhist religion, the traditions of the various forms of Buddhism and how the religion assimilated with local cultures as it spread to the East, and the canon and practice of Buddhism in the lives of its adherents.

My only criticism of this volume is that its aim is a little too ambitious. The editors have done a great job in providing as much information as possible covering such a wide-ranging subject as Buddhism. At a length of 923 pages, this book is a valuable reference tool, though the editors' claim to provide everything that a student or scholar would need to know about Buddhism seems a bit too grandiose. All of the aspects of Buddhism pertaining to the numerous countries where it grew and flourished simply cannot be covered in a volume of fewer than a thousand pages.

I highly recommend *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* for purchase by university and seminary libraries. This encyclopedia would be very useful both to those with little or no knowledge of Buddhism and to those who know more about the religion. This book comes as close as possible to meeting its aim of providing an all-encompassing single-volume reference source.

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