

\* Proverb Pillow Made by the Students (for Wolfgang Mieder)  
 Thank You Letter to the Students (Wolfgang Mieder)  
 Several Letters from Parents

For several years I have taught proverbs in my first-year university oral communication courses. This book has given me many ideas on how to make teaching these courses more effective and entertaining. Although I have made a list of 40 proverbs for my course, the list of 150 proverbs provided in the book contains many proverbs that I will consider adding to my list or will use instead of the ones already on my list. The pages that present proverbs in advertising and cartoons will help introduce the idea of proverbs and show how proverbs appear in many forms in daily life. The forty illustrated proverb interpretations can be used for class discussion or serve as examples for an activity to draw out students' understanding of the proverbs they have learned. For example, one student's illustration of the proverb "There is nothing new under the sun," shows cooking over a campfire in the year 1505 and cooking on a stove in 2000 with the explanation: "I think this proverb means that there is nothing new in the world it just gets better" (159).

Which proverbs did children liked best? What value did they find in the proverbs? How did the proverbs enter their lives? The answers to these and many other questions are contained in this entertaining and informative report. The eighth question in the Final Student Questionnaire reads: "What would you like Professor Mieder to know about this project?" One student writes: "I would like Professor Mieder to know that I really enjoyed working with him. I think he's the nicest world famous I've ever met" (210). Read the book and you will understand why.

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OTTO, BEATRICE K. *Fools Are Everywhere: The Court Jester Around the World*.  
 Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. xxiv + 420 pages.  
 Illustrations, appendix, glossary of Chinese characters, bibliography, and  
 index. Cloth US\$45.00/£28.50 ISBN 0-226-64091-4.

The title proclaims the thesis: fools are everywhere. (Not exactly everywhere, but "he is not the product of any particular time or place" [xvii].) The many examples range from the well-known British jester and his kind throughout the mainland of Europe, via Asia to China, which has the earliest and longest jester tradition. The examples follow each other without evaluation. Their existence shows the extent of the phenomenon and this mere existence appears to be enough to warrant inclusion in the text. Often the original texts are given so readers can appreciate the nuances that are lost in translation. As the chapters move on, Beatrice Otto sometimes offers conclusions, but generally the readers are left to make their own deductions.

The British court jester had antecedents in Greek and Roman fools. Sometimes retarded or physically handicapped, the fool from a lower social status was not a threat to the authority of the king. So the fool could speak his mind with impunity. Such fools were cultivated because kings realized their value in holding up a mirror to the kings' own stupidities. A wise word put as a joke from a fool could prevent the king from making a fool of himself. In Europe, a costume was added and the fool became a jester, known for his quick, insulting wit. He entertained the king and his court. He also served as an unofficial counselor representing

the ordinary people. As in Europe, court fools/jesters in China also enjoyed the freedom to make fun of the ruler. However, should they not be witty enough to laugh the ruler out of his anger, they could be punished, even executed. Another difference in China was that the jester often made allusions to history or literature. Otto expands the jester or court fool category to include stories of tricksters, rogues, clowns, actors, and satirical cartoonists.

Many people helped Otto gather examples from different countries. Most examples came from European countries, especially Great Britain, and from China. India and countries of the Middle East also account for a large number. Japan has only three examples, including the general reference to a Zen monk. American Indians have three references but two refer to tricksters and one to holy fools. The examples raise questions: What conditions allow jesters to flourish? An autocracy? Why did they appear most frequently in England between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries? Was it due to a more consolidated monarchy? For the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, clowns and political cartoonists are discussed as if they are the modern equivalents. But are they really equivalent? They have no direct support of the rulers nor are they cultivated by rulers as safeguards. What caused jesters to die out in China where the tradition survived for millennia? The questions go on. Readers are free to draw their own conclusions.

Sometimes one wishes the author had often done more than merely present the examples. On pages 23 and 24 the advantages of being a hunchback are shown. But on page 115 in the context of an Arab tale, it is said that "A hunchback was supposedly a bad omen, a malign being who should be avoided." Of course, different cultures, different values, but in the general discussion of jesters, is it or is it not an advantage to have a hunchback?

Also the text could have been more crisp: the author could have deleted the repetitive stories or examples that were listed for apparently no other reason than the mere fact that they exist. For example, in the following quotation, of what value is the first sentence? "There is a letter written in dialect in 1495 from the dwarf jester Antonio da Trento to the marquis of Mantua. Another letter dated 24 July 1512, from the marquis to the dwarf, addresses him as 'Little Dwarf' (Nanino) and graphically explains why he should rein himself in..." (138). Then the story is given in translation, followed by the original. Immediately after, comes an example from Samuel Pepys about the court jester Tom Killigrew. What did the dwarf say in the first letter? Was the 1512 letter a reply?

Since the examples usually explain so little of the context, superfluous sentences and remarks are a waste of needed space. What is the value of the following tangential remark? "There was a jester-musician of the Hebei region called Mule (Shi Luoer)—incidentally also the name of the megalomaniac jester, with a beaked nose and 'long, lean limbs... with just a suggestion of having been thrown together at random,' who tries to take over the universe in Isaac Asimov's *Foundation and Empire*" (146). And on what basis was it decided to provide some Chinese names in Roman-letter transcription and others in English translation as if they were nicknames? (I suppose the jesters were given nicknames?) There seems to be more involved here, but we are not told.

Sometimes a story is introduced but not concluded. Was the source cited merely as another example? "When George Buchanan offended the queen, she demanded that the king allow her to punish him. Sure of his jester's Houdini-like ability to evade harm, he agreed, 'well knowing that George would rescue himself by some intrigue or other' " (152). End of anecdote, on to the next episode. What happened to George? Did he escape? Probably he escaped because the next tale tells of George knocking a knight's hat off with his head still in it. (A shortened version of the same tale appears in the next chapter, with reference to a bishop [164].)

Sometimes it seems as if the sections were written by different people. On page 159 it is

stated that the jesters' attacks on religion "were not aimed at religion so much as at its representatives." But, on page 167, it is said that "jokers can rarely resist desanctifying the sacred with their laughter." Isn't "sacred" associated with God, prayer, and grace? Representatives are another category as the first reference on page 159 distinguishes so well. The reference on page 167 seems to have come from a different frame of mind.

Likewise, in Chapter 2 several pages (142–46) give examples of Chinese rulers executing jesters for their offensive remarks. But in Chapter 3 the following summary appears: "In China there seems little indication that anybody, religious or secular, disapproved of court jesters as such, although people did occasionally voice strong criticism when they felt the jester had gone too far in his mockery" (177). Perhaps, since Chapter 3 is entitled "Religion, Erudition, and Irreverence," what is meant is that jesters could poke fun at anyone with impunity as long as the butt of the joke was not a ruler. Nevertheless, the images of executions clash with the statement that people in the past did "occasionally voice strong criticism" of jesters.

*Fools are Everywhere* shows the existence of court jesters in many countries. It can provide ideas for further study and analysis. The book succeeds in presenting the general characteristics of jesters, especially the classic jesters of England and China. Above all, it takes away the illusion that only Shakespeare's England enjoyed such characters and introduces readers to the rich traditional court fool lore in China.

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## JAPAN

FITZHUGH, WILLIAM W. and CHISATO O. DUBREUIL, Editors. *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People*. Washington D.C.: Arctic Studies Center, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, 2001. 415 pages. Color and b/w illustrations, maps, checklist of artifacts, bibliography, index. Paper US\$49.95; ISBN 0-9673429-0-2. (Distributed by University of Washington Press, Seattle)

*Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People* is an impressive and beautiful book, rich in elaborate illustrations of Ainu artifacts. It also includes drawings and photographic images of the Ainu by early visitors such as Japanese artists (including those who produced the *Ainu-e*), merchants, traders, explorers, exploiters, curators, and ethnographers. The book is a catalog published in association with an exhibition of the same title organized by the Arctic Studies Center, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution. It contains an extensive list of Ainu illustrations, a detailed index, a thorough bibliography, and essays on artifacts and plates of famous and notable Ainu collections that can be found in museums and exhibition halls around the world. Bringing together the works of prominent scholars in the Ainu field as well as incorporating works written by the Ainu, *Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People* is a treasure for non-Japanese and non-Russian speaking researchers with an interest in the material, written and gathered, on the Ainu.

Starting with an essay entitled "Ainu Ethnicity: A History," the organizing principle behind the book, as well as the exhibition, is clearly presented. The organization of the book and exhibition relates the concept of ethnicity to "Ainu-ness" at different periods in history