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# The Classics of Non-Western Political Thought: A Reader (Book Still In Development)

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**Comparative Political Thought: A Non-Western Reader**, Edited by Jon D. Carlson  
(Reader proposal)

**Target Audience:** Adv. Undergraduate, MA, General Interest, University Library.

**Fields of Interest:** Political Theory/Philosophy; Area Studies: Islamic, Chinese, Indic, and African Studies; Comparative Politics; International Relations.

**Length:** Word Count – can vary and depends on length of selections approved.  
Manuscript pages, estimated at 450-550 depending on layout and design.

**Market Competition:** No similar readers presently exist, only disparate area studies volumes on cultural philosophy. There are comparative philosophy volumes, but none dealing with political thought.

**ABSTRACT:**

Comparative political theory is an emerging field within the discipline of political theory, and has implications for the political science subfields of comparative politics and international relations. Yet there is no readily accessible Reader that brings together foundational readings from more than one ‘area’ of study. Instead, “political thought” is treated as an exclusively western dialogue dominated by European philosophers (*e.g.*, Cambridge’s series on the history of political thought, medieval thought, and almost every other political thought reader). Or when non-western thinkers do appear, they are relegated to individual volumes associated with “area studies” readers (*e.g.*, Chinese philosophy, Islamic philosophy). Further, these area studies readers usually discount the prevalence of political thinking, as they are erroneously presented as philosophy and not formal political theory. I rebut that basic tenet.

This reader, “Comparative Political Thought,” accomplishes several tasks. First, it introduces comparative political theory as a field and in such a way as to be accessible to an undergraduate or general audience. This is done by providing brief introductory readings to not only lay out the problems, but also the promise that comparative political theory holds in an age of increased global awareness and cross-cultural contact. These readings address topics of methodology, cross-cultural comparison, translation or comprehension, and they reinforce the notion of ‘civilization’ as an important unit of analysis within political science.

Second, this work fills the gap of there being no extant comprehensive comparative political theory reader. While there are area studies readers, this edited volume combines significant historic and foundational works from various philosophical traditions: Chinese, Islamic and pre-Islamic Middle East, Indic/Hindu, and African. This is done in an effort to provide an orderly framework for an accessible introduction to a daunting array of new cultures, names, ideas and authors. Each civilizational section is organized chronologically, with a brief introduction (approx 5 pages), a section for suggested further reading, and each author’s work includes a brief biographical and conceptual introduction (approx 1 page) to provide historic and philosophical context. Accordingly, this volume introduces readers to rich alternate traditions of political thought beyond the western canon, and may be seen as a complement to (or perhaps

replacement for) existing introductory area studies volumes. As such, it is a 'gateway' book in this regard and can readily complement more in-depth offerings in a publisher's catalog.

Third, the notion of using 'equivalences' – similar concepts from different civilizational settings – is used as a means of engaging in cross-civilizational dialogue and productive new political theorizing. So readers are not just reading "stuff," but actively seeking to make external connections between sections. An overt agenda within comparative political theory is to open up the body of western thought to engagement with the philosophical diversity of a globalized world. To borrow from Anthony Parel, it is possible to compare "the Aristotelian *politicos* and the Confucian *junzi*, Indian *dharma* and the pre-modern western notion of 'natural justice,' the Islamic prophet-legislator and the Platonic philosopher-king." How do different peoples think about 'good' or 'bad' kings? Justice and virtue? The role of individuals within society? What is human nature? What implication does this hold for 'democracy' and good citizenship? By providing one volume with readings from multiple civilizational discourses, this Reader eases the application and visualization of 'equivalences,' for scholars and students alike.

Finally, this volume has important implications for the fields of comparative politics and international relations. International relations as a field is dominated by much discussion of the 'clash of civilizations' and the impact of globalization. This work lays out a foundation for understanding both, and it reinforces the notion of 'civilization' as an important and underdeveloped unit of analysis in international relations. Do other civilizations think differently about relations between kings, nations, and justice than do those of the west? Yes, it is natural that they might. To the extent that two rising challengers for leadership in the international system are China and India, this volume serves as an introduction to Chinese and Indic bodies of thought. In comparative politics, emphasis is shifting toward a concern with disparate interpretations of democracy, the impact of culture, and the measurable difference in national values (*e.g.*, the World Values Survey). Democracy means different things to different people. This Reader helps unpack the socio-cultural historic elements and civilizational difference behind what is seen as "good" behavior and "just" politics. As such, it may be seen as complementing the constructivist agenda in international relations and the political culture focus in comparative politics. This Reader is a valuable tool for students of either of these additional subfields of political science.

Quite simply, culture matters in politics. Culture matters when we undertake the systematic study of political behavior. This volume treats culture – taken to mean the aggregate shared historic, religious or philosophical traditions within a given social unit – seriously. If we are to treat 'civilizations' as a new unit of analysis, then we need to understand the shared conceptual frameworks that provide for joint and often unspoken understanding within a given civilization. This volume lays the foundation for doing exactly that, by examining important works in political thought from all bodies of thought, not just the European tradition. This Reader progresses our understanding of comparative political theory by helping solidify it as a discrete field of study, and allows for easy comparison between writers from civilizational backgrounds including Chinese, Indic, Middle Eastern, and African.

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