

## BOOK REVIEWS

## Made in China

### *Ideas and Inventions from Ancient China*

By Suzanne Williams  
Selected illustrations by Andrea Fong

BERKELEY, CA: PACIFIC VIEW PRESS, 1996  
48 PAGES INCLUDING INDEX

This book, according to the publisher's information sheet, is aimed at young people ages 9–13. Although it follows a timeline from the Xia Dynasty through the Ming, it does not rely on a narrative that would require the user to begin on the first page.

Instead, *Made in China* functions more like an encyclopedia, allowing the young reader to delve into the Chinese counting system before reading about paper even though paper precedes the counting system in the book. The index shows how the author has repeated and linked inventions throughout. Bronze is one of her first entries, and references to it appear six more times, enabling the young researcher to connect bronze with, among other things, bells and printing.

Another useful link Suzanne Williams makes is between the old and the new. The section on bells begins by mentioning CDs and radios, and elsewhere Williams makes centuries-old connections where appropriate. The readers of this journal don't have to be told how much Chinese technology is overlooked in western curricula and how valuable the ties between the ancient and the modern are. We honor Gutenberg but ignore Bi Sheng, who is credited with inventing movable type 450 years before the German inventor.

A field trip to the Customs House where the east gate to old Beijing once stood would quickly demonstrate how the ancient Chinese



understood the heavens and tracked natural disasters such as earthquakes. Some of the ancient devices on display at the Customs House are nicely illustrated by Andrea Fong and further explained in boxes along the margins of the page.

Among other topics Williams writes about are agriculture, the crossbow, the terra cotta warriors of Xi'an, salt, iron, astronomy, silk, clocks and compasses, Chinese medicine, and shipbuilding.

Missing from the book is a pronunciation guide for Chinese names, thus leaving it up to the classroom teacher to explain that the founding emperor's surname, Qin, is pronounced Chin, and it is from his name that China is derived.

Anyone doing a segment on China or integrating China into a larger curriculum will find *Made in China* a handy reference tool for students. ■

R. Thomas Berner

**R. THOMAS BERNER** taught in the China School of Journalism on a Fulbright lectureship in the spring of 1994. He returned in 1996 to give a paper on Qian Gang and John Hersey at an international comparative literature conference in Changchun. He is the author of "The Ancient Chinese Process of Reprography" in the April 1997 *Technology and Culture*.

## A Girl Like Me and Other Stories

(Enlarged Edition)

By Xi Xi, Various translators  
Afterword by Stephen C. Soong

HONG KONG: THE RESEARCH CENTRE FOR TRANSLATION  
CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG  
1996. 134 PAGES.

These ten stories by Xi Xi, the pen name for Zhang Yan, are explorations of settings, themes, and characters which should be of interest to students of Asian literature, culture and society. The back cover states, "There is in these stories a haunting . . . lyricism, an intense feminine sensitivity, reacting to the unique environment of Hong Kong . . ." the city where this contemporary writer, born in Shanghai, has lived since 1950. Xi Xi (pronounced Si Si) was a primary school teacher, and her simple,

clear style conveys a childlike simplicity which will appeal to high school students. Yet her themes and content are provocative and informative, and so in these stories high school as well as college students can study the fusion of East and West in universal themes that are treated from an Asian perspective, and flavored with the author's English-style education. Stephen Soong writes in the afterword, "Building a House: Introducing Xi Xi," "[She] is very much a writer in 'Made in Hong Kong.' . . . Xi Xi grew up in a free society, a society with its own unique pattern of development. . . . But the problems Xi Xi touches upon are those most Chinese are concerned with: the causes of political order and disorder, the relationship between ruler and people, etc." (133–34).

The first two stories in this volume, "A Girl Like Me" and "The Cold," are examinations of self and society through the theme of love. The teacher can draw parallels between personal feelings about love portrayed here and Western concepts of love, but the situations here are inherently Eastern. Family pressure and sensitivity to convention can be examined in the high school classroom and comparisons and contrasts easily evoked, drawing students into observations about family versus personal values in Asia.

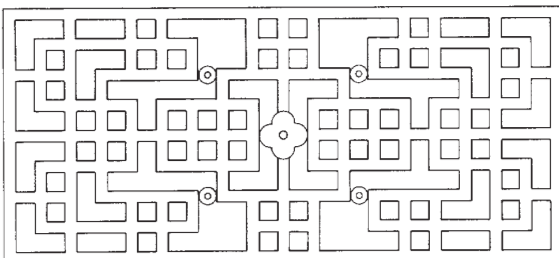
Both "Maria," which is set in the Congo, and "Cross of Gallantry," which is set in Mongolia, are stories about the poignancy and inevitability of war. Though the setting of "Maria" seems a bit incongruous in this little volume, its fascinating characters (a mercenary and a missionary woman) and universal subject matter dramatize the fact that in war, regardless of the location, civilians and soldiers struggle with the same problems. The woman and man in "Maria" show us a fragmented, abstract relationship between people caught in violence. When juxtaposed with the next story, "Cross of Gallantry," the reader understands, through another relationship (a boy and his uncle) that war transcends cultural circumstances. The isolation of the soldier, and the tragedy of passing on the legacy of war to the next generation, can be felt in both the Congo and Mongolia.

"Asuo" provides perhaps the clearest cultural piece of the collection. In a very short four-page vignette, the author conveys the scene of a child standing in front of a tent in Kazhakstan, her thoughts about growing up, her relationship with her family, and the conditions of her life in relationship with the foreign people around her. It is a beautiful and simple way for high school or undergraduate students to learn about a life which they might have led, had they been born in this part of the world. Because of the clear and visually evocative writing, a high school teacher could ask students to draw what they have read, to react to the situation that the girl finds herself in, to predict a future for the girl, and to discuss any number of feelings that might be going through the mind of the girl.

When reading prose by a writer from another culture, it is valuable to examine both the content of the writing and the approach to that content. While an explicit portrayal of culture occurs in only a few of these stories, the author's outlook on universal themes and her style of writing should not be forgotten. I have discussed five of the ten stories in this volume which I believe are most suitable for a high school student. But the remainder are beautifully written as well, and should be considered, either in an advanced high school or undergraduate class on Asian literature. They represent the thoughts of a woman living in an Asian country that is intensely integrated with Western culture. This writer from Hong Kong gives us a chance to see how the two cultures have melded, and how Western writing techniques have been assimilated by a Chinese sensibility. ■

Laurie Baker

**LAURIE BAKER** has taught English language at the Pohang University of Science and Technology in Pohang, South Korea for the past two years. Before coming to Korea, she taught English literature and language for eight years in a California high school.



## Japan: Why It Works, Why It Doesn't

Economics in Everyday Life

edited by  
James Mak  
Shyam Sunder  
Shigeyuki Abe  
and Kazuhiro Igawa

Provides concise explanations of everyday Japanese life in simplified economic terms. Each essay begins with a question about an aspect of how Japanese people live, work, and operate within the government system. The twenty-six essays are written in non-technical, accessible language. Readers will find the book a fascinating compendium of facts on Japan's culture and daily life.

## The Chrysanthemum Throne

A History of the Emperors of Japan

Peter Martin

*The Chrysanthemum Throne* surveys the history and political and religious status of the monarchy of Japan from its mythological origins to our own times. The book throws new light on the role played by the throne since the Meiji restoration in 1868 and Japan's subsequent emergence as one of the leading economic powers in the world.

## Hirohito and War

Imperial Tradition and Military  
Decision Making in Prewar Japan

Peter Wetzler

Peter Wetzler documents Emperor Hirohito's accountability for government decisions and military operations up to the end of World War II. *Hirohito and War* furnishes impressive evidence for an interpretation of Hirohito that goes beyond an emphasis on the complexities of his constitutional position and instead focuses on the emperor's abiding preoccupation with preserving the imperial institution itself.

## Hong Kong

The Anthropology of a Chinese Metropolis

edited by Grant Evans and Maria Tam

This collection of essays looks at modern Hong Kong in all its splendor and diversity through the mediums of film, food, architecture, rumors, and slang. *Hong Kong* also presents an intriguing insight into the process of transition from "tradition" to "modernity" in this modern Chinese metropolis.

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