

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

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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.