


## BOOK REVIEWS

**Great Love Stories of China in Fiction**  
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**Butterfly Lovers: A Tale of the Chinese Romeo and Juliet** by Fan Dai, ISBN 09665421-4-2, \$16.95




"The story has all of the elements of a great tragic love affair...and an ending in which the star-crossed lovers are transmuted into a pair of butterflies." — School Library Journal

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— Ang Lee, director of the Oscar winning movie *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*

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by Xiaoping Yen, ISBN 0-9665421-2-6, \$16.95



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— Publishers Weekly

"No soap opera; it's a Chinese love story...that evokes the subdued sensuality of Ming Dynasty romance."  
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social change in Taiwanese religion. The volume's editor, Murray A. Rubinstein, wrote two articles, one on Taiwan's socioeconomic modernization from 1971 to 1996, and a second creative and informative article on the relationship between Chiang Ching-kuo's "Taiwanization" policy in the 1970s (the recruitment of promising Taiwanese into the Kuomintang government) and Lee Teng-hui's Pragmatic Diplomacy policy. This collection presents balanced, solid research without turning away from the controversies of contemporary Taiwanese politics. A commendable feat. ■

**LIANG HONG-MING** is a student of Professor Laurence A. Schneider at the Department of History, Washington University in St. Louis. His Ph. D. dissertation is entitled "Nationalism and the Education Policies of the Kuomintang, 1927-1949." His research interests include modern Chinese political history and modern Taiwanese history.

## The Classic of the Way and Virtue

### *A New Translation of the Tao-Te Ching of Laozi As Interpreted by Wang Bi*

Translated by Richard John Lynn

NEW YORK: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1999  
244 PAGES

Since 1868, almost fifty major English translations of the ancient Chinese classic known as *Laozi* (Lao-tzu) or *Daodejing* (Tao Te Ching) have appeared in print—to say nothing of the countless, less reliable translations which seem to sprout on bookstore shelves like mushrooms after spring rains. The student or teacher of Chinese literature, religions, philosophy, or history might well ask: "Why another translation?" In this case, the appearance of yet another translation is distinguished by two distinctive contributions to the way in which English-speaking readers encounter the text. Richard John Lynn has juxtaposed his translation of the text with its most influential early commentary, that of Wang Bi (226–249 C.E.), and has rendered both in a masterly, clear, and dignified English prose. Those who pick up this new volume will discover—or rediscover—old treasures of early Chinese thought, made more profound and in many ways more accessible by these twin gifts of commentary and clarity. They also will find that this translation, like the many which precede it, stakes out controversial positions regarding the nature of the text, the relationship between the movements which have claimed it for their own, and the meaning of key terms.

In accordance with most contemporary Western scholarship on the text (but out of step with many leading Chinese studies), Lynn presents *Daodejing* as a fourth-century B.C.E. work of composite authorship, rather than as the “book” of a single sixth-century B.C.E. author, “Laozi” (“Old Master”). However, unlike other scholars who accept this theory of the text’s authorship and development, Lynn does not speculate on how the existence of multiple authorial and historical layers within the text might affect its reading as a coherent work. In effect, although Lynn is careful to note textual problems and discrepancies between various manuscripts, he—like Wang Bi—appears to regard it as a text which can be read as the integrated work of an author with a single, coherent vision. That vision, according to Lynn, is primarily concerned with political and military mastery of the ancient Chinese world, and not (as many readers and interpreters of the text have insisted, including the vast majority of Daoist exegetes) with spiritual self-cultivation or mystical techniques of contemplation.

In this matter, Lynn merely follows the lead of Wang Bi—or does he? In addition to Wang Bi’s line-by-line commentary on the text, Lynn also translates Wang Bi’s *Laozi zhilue* (Outline Introduction to the *Laozi*), which establishes Wang’s preoccupation with the political and military lessons offered by the text. Yet Wang Bi was well known as a member of the *xuanxue* (“Dark Learning”) movement of so-called “Neo-Daoism,” and here and there in his commentary, he makes references to religious and cosmological lore which Lynn passes over without any comment of his own. Lynn also omits any mention of Wang Bi’s family connections to the early medieval Chinese empire builder Cao Cao (155–220 C.E.), whose official endorsement of the Celestial Masters (*Tianshi*) sect marked the beginning of its public acceptance as a movement within so-called “religious Daoism.” Instead,

Lynn advances the theory (without offering any substantial evidence) that “mystical” readings of *Daodejing* can be traced to the influence of another composite fourth-century B.C.E. text, *Zhuangzi* (*Chuang-zu*), with which *Daodejing* shares a certain number of common terms and concepts, although the two texts differ considerably in many other respects. Lynn’s insistence on presenting *Daodejing* as a purely political document is, therefore, problematic—not because of Lynn’s interpretive preference (the text itself is plastic enough to allow for a plurality of interpretations), but because of his failure to locate his interpretation in the more general context of the reception history of the text.

Thus, students confused by the various presentations of this classic text (mystical self-help manual, career advice for ruthless tyrants, esoteric philosophical treatise) may gain some understanding of the controversy by reading Lynn’s (and Wang Bi’s) comments on the work, but because Lynn doesn’t spend enough time accounting for the disparities between his and others’ interpretations of the text, this translation cannot truly initiate readers into the field of disputation. Lynn’s skillful translation and inclusion of Wang Bi’s introduction and commentary, however, allow students and other readers the opportunity to grapple directly with such hermeneutical issues as they are being worked out by an early and crucial interpreter and redactor of the text. The socio-historical and biographical sketches offered by Lynn in his introduction provide invaluable helps to students who may not be familiar with Wang Bi and his times.

The technical and stylistic qualities of the translation are excellent, although occasional problems (as always) do arise in the rendering and explanation of key terms. In part, such problems may be the result of Lynn’s reluctance to establish a sense of historical and authorial distance between the writers and compilers of



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the text and Wang Bi himself. Lynn's task is to translate the text "as interpreted by Wang Bi," and this he does, expertly. Nonetheless, well-known problems in the translation of this text into English receive inconsistent degrees of attention. Lynn nuances the term *xin* (the composite organ representing the functions of both heart and mind in traditional Chinese thought) nicely, if a little gracelessly, as "heart/mind," and in doing so, offers his non-Sinological reader a valuable insight into the difficulties of translating ancient texts. On the other hand, the term *de* ("power," "virtue," *mana*) is rendered, without explanation, as "virtue" throughout the text, in spite of compelling arguments by other scholars of the text that such monolithic translations of polyvalent terms do great violence to the work's original meanings. In general, however, Lynn renders the classical Chinese text into a graceful and dignified English prose which is somewhat reminiscent of the 1611 *Authorized Translation of the Bible*, albeit without any of the stiff or antiquarian qualities that such a comparison might suggest to the contemporary reader.

In conclusion, this is one of those translations which, while felicitous in its prose style and choice of renderings, still presents the knowledgeable teacher, student, or general reader with some grounds for objection and argument. Teachers without Sinological training may want to adopt another, less thematically narrow translation—but they will miss the opportunity to introduce themselves and their students to the work of an important interpreter of the text. Instructors who bring considerable background to their

teaching of the text should not hesitate to use this translation—but they should expect to argue with it, with possibly quite fruitful pedagogical results. ■

JEFFREY L. RICHEY is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Findlay in Findlay, Ohio. He specializes in the religious thought and practice of early China.

## The Chinese Revolution

By Edward J. Lazzerini

WESTPORT, CT: GREENWOOD PRESS, 1999  
GREENWOOD PRESS GUIDES TO HISTORIC EVENTS  
OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY  
197 + XIX PAGES

Edward Lazzerini's book is an important addition to the Guides to Historic Events of the Twentieth Century series published by the Greenwood Press. It provides a succinct overview of Chinese political history from the last decade of the nineteenth century to the present in a clear and crisp language which will be helpful to both students and non-specialist instructors. The author is particularly and refreshingly unorthodox in explaining Confucian China's struggle for modernization and industrialization from the perspectives of the country's internal dynamics. This indeed is a fresh interpretation of the history of the making of modern China in place of the stereotypical explanation emphasizing a cultural confrontation between the agrarian Orient and the technical industrial West.

Lazzerini studies the history of the Chinese Revolution in three phases: (1) the republican revolution (1890s to 1920s) of Sun Yat-sen, Chen Duxiu, Cai Yuanpei, and Hu Shi leading to the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1921; (2) the nationalist revolution, largely carried out by the Guomindang Party (GMD) founded by Sun and refined and vitalized by his protégé Chiang Kai-shek (1920s to 1949); and (3) the communist revolution of Mao Zedong followed by the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949.

While much of what the author observes on classical Marxism in general, and the Sino-Soviet distortions of it in particular, is interesting and innovative, the tone of his language betrays his skewed vision of communist world order. He dismisses Mao's Great Leap Forward program of 1957 as the product of a benighted and bigoted revolutionary whose initial success was predicated on his skill at mass mobilization and manipulation through a forceful imposition of personal will (voluntarism).

### MUSEUM QUALITY EXHIBITS

"MY LIFE IS MY MESSAGE"—40 panels (2' x 4') of photographs with captions on the life of Mahatma Gandhi.

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Also—smaller portable (sent by mail) exhibits, video cassettes (including biographical documentaries of Gandhi) and other resources available for loan.

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