



The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A New Translation of the Tao-te Ching of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi (Translations from the Asian Classics)

By Wang Bi, Laozi

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The essential Taoist book and one of a triad that make up the most influential religious and philosophical writings of Chinese tradition, the *Tao-te Ching* is the subject of hundreds of new interpretive studies each year. As Taoism emerges as one of the East Asian philosophies most interesting to Westerners, an accessible new edition of this great work?written for English-language readers, yet rendered with an eye toward Chinese understanding?has been much needed by scholars and general readers.

Richard John Lynn, whose recent translation of the *I Ching* was hailed by the *Times Literary Supplement* as "the best *I Ching* that has so far appeared," presents here another fine translation. Like his *I Ching*, this volume includes the interpretive commentary of the third-century scholar Wang Bi (226-249), who wrote the first and most sophisticated commentary on the *Tao-te Ching*.

Lynn's introduction explores the centrality of Wang's commentaries in Chinese thought, the position of the *Tao-te Ching* in East Asian tradition, Wang's short but brilliant life, and the era in which he lived. The text consists of eighty-one short, aphoristic sections presenting a complete view of how the sage rules in accordance with the spontaneous ways of the natural world. Although the *Tao-te Ching* was originally designed to provide advice to the ruler, the Chinese regard its teachings as living and self-cultivation tools applicable to anyone. Wang Bi's commentaries, following each statement, flesh out the text so that it speaks to the modern Western reader as it has to Asians for more than seventeen centuries.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

The most translated Chinese classic is here given another translation filtered through the commentary of Wang Bi (226-249), renowned for his brilliant but direct approach to many Chinese works. Originally intended as guidance for rulers, the Tao-te Ching became a guide for living in accordance with the Way (Tao). The 81 sections, divided into two parts, usually have a few lines (sometimes just one) followed by Wang Bi's comment, often discussing the meaning of a word romanized from the Chinese. Notes follow each section. Scholars with a knowledge of Chinese will find this text informative and interesting, but others may be annoyed at the scholarly apparatus. More accessible translations are those by Witter Bynner, Robert G. Hendricks, D.C. Lau, Arthur Waley, and the poet and sf writer Ursula Le Guin, among many others. Nevertheless, Lynn (East Asian studies, Univ. of Alberta), who has also translated *The Classic of Changes* (LJ 9/1/94), does a very able job. Recommended for academic libraries with Asian studies sections. AKitty Dean Chen, Nassau Coll., Garden City, NY
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Review

Lynn's translation is excellent. He approaches Wang Bi's text as it should be approached, that is as a piece of philosophical writing... [A]n important contribution to our knowledge of commentarial methodology which played a dominating role throughout the intellectual history of imperial China.

(Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia)

Lynn's translation is finely crafted, following the high standard he established in his *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi...* [An] excellent, high-impact stud[y].

(Alan K. L. Chan Journal of Chinese Religions)

Review

With this beautiful translation buttressed by the best of scholarship on *Laozi* in Chinese and Japanese as well as in Western languages, Richard Lynn has brought Wang Bi's commentaries to life in English and greatly enhanced our understanding of the *Dao de jing*. A monumental achievement!

(Zhang Longxi, University of California, Riverside; City University of Hong Kong)

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