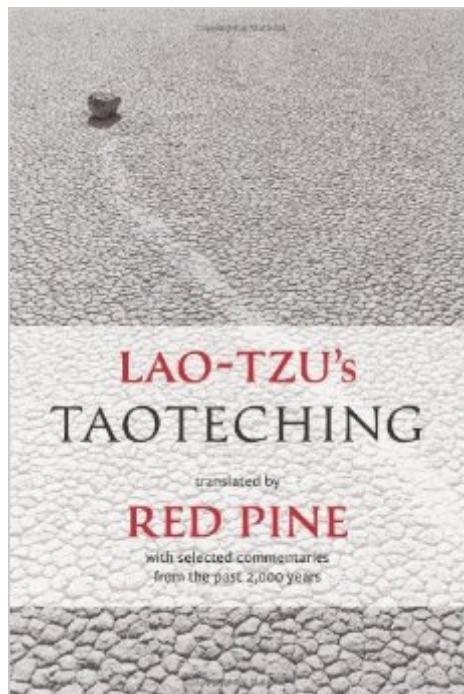


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Lao-tzu's Taoteching



Synopsis

One of the best-selling English-language translations of the *Taoteching*.¹ A refreshing new translation. . . . Highly recommended.² *Library Journal*³ With its clarity and scholarly range, this version of the *Taoteching* works as both a readable text and a valuable resource of Taoist interpretation.⁴ *Publishers Weekly*⁵ Read it in confidence that it comes as close as possible to expressing the Chinese text in English.⁶ *Victor Mair*, professor of Chinese studies, University of Pennsylvania Lao-tzu's *Taoteching* is an essential volume of world literature, and Red Pine's⁷ nuanced and authoritative English translation⁸ reissued and published with the Chinese text en face⁹ is one of the best-selling versions. Features that set this volume apart from other translations are its commentaries by scores of Taoist scholars, poets, monks, recluses, adepts, and emperors spanning more than two thousand years. ¹⁰ I envisioned this book, Red Pine notes in his introduction, ¹¹ as a discussion between Lao-tzu and a group of people who have thought deeply about his text. ¹² Sages have no mind of their own¹³ their mind is the mind of the people¹⁴ to the good they are good¹⁵ to the bad they are good¹⁶ until they become good¹⁷ to the true they are true¹⁸ to the false they are true¹⁹ until they become true . . . Lao-tzu (ca. 600 BCE) was a Chinese sage who Confucius called ²⁰ a dragon among men. ²¹ He served as Keeper of the Royal Archives and authored the *Taoteching*. Red Pine is one of the world's foremost translators of Chinese literary and religious texts. His books include *The Heart Sutra*, *Poems of the Masters*, and a collection of all the known poems by the mountain hermit Han Shan, *The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*.

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Customer Reviews

I've been reading translations of the *Taoteching* since I was twelve years old. No text has resonated more with my intimate experience of the natural world. In the verses of the *Taoteching* I found a philosophy that matched the depth and wonder I experienced while wandering for uncounted hours through the countryside of my boyhood home. Red Pine revised in 2009 his translation of this ancient text, and what a revision! The small changes in phrasing throughout the text further clarify the spirit of the *Taoteching* and lend a universal resonance. One important change is a shift toward inclusive pronouns. Gone are the masculine references to sages, and in their stead sages are addressed in the plural, as a collective. This inclusiveness fits well with the spirit of the *Taoteching*. This subtle yet significant change needs to be considered in a larger context: This translation of the *Taoteching* has it all. Each verse includes its modern Chinese, lending an artful presence and a resource to those with a scholarly interest in the origins of the text. Each verse includes commentary from the past 2000 years that further illuminates the spirit of the *Taoteching*. The simple and direct language of Red Pine's earlier translation remains and rings like timeless poetry. My one struggle is that I keep giving away my copy and have to buy it repeatedly. This book is too fine a gem to keep to oneself.

Anyone looking for an approachable edition of the *Tao Te Ching*, one that gives us the Chinese and Taoist point-of-view in clear and simple English, and that isn't overburdened with extraneous or purely scholarly matter, should certainly consider that of Red Pine. The translator has spent much of his life in the East, has experienced the life of a Taoist ascetic, and we could ask for no better guide to the meanings of this simple but elusive text, a text that is one of the greatest glories of the Ancient Chinese literature of the Chou period. As many know, Classical Chinese is an extremely concise and powerful language, a language of great masculine vigor, and one of the first things to look for in any translation from Classical Chinese is a comparable economy and energy. Some people don't seem to understand this, and I think it's because they fail to realize that words, besides expressing meaning, can also serve to limit meaning, especially in grammatically fussy Indo-European languages such as English where sentences are intended to convey as precise a meaning as possible and in doing so can become (as mine are here) rather wordy. But ancient Chinese writing isn't like this. Rather than attempting to narrow and delimit meaning, and to pin us down to something particular and explicit, it aims instead to open and expand our understanding. In

other words, although it can look deceptively simple, it is in fact richly suggestive, rich in implications. And this rich suggestiveness will suggest many things to different readers. That is why no Chinese reader would even think of approaching an ancient classic without a commentary. For no matter what a text may suggest to a given reader, we may be sure that it has suggested many more things to earlier and possibly more acute readers. Red Pine does not fail us on either of these counts. His translation is spare, pure, even austere, but whereas most English editions of the Tao Te Ching give us only the comments of the individual translator, Red Pine has gone one further. He has had the brilliant idea of giving us, on pages facing the text, a selection of passages from over twenty of China's most outstanding commentators, figures ranging from the famous philosopher Wang Pi (+ 226-249) through to the Sung Dynasty Taoist nun Ts'ao Tao-Ch'ung (+ 960-1278), and this is something which has never been done before in English. Red Pine tells us that he "envisioned this book as a discussion between Lao-tzu and a group of people who have thought deeply about his text" (page xxi). Many of the comments, which are intended "to provide important background information or insights," are truly luminous, and to read them along with the text can be an overwhelming experience. Here is Chapter 47 of Red Pine's translation, slightly rearranged since it should be set out as verse: "Without going out his door / he knows the whole world / without looking out his window / he knows the Way of Heaven / the farther people go / the less people know / therefore the sage knows without moving / names without seeing / succeeds without trying." (page 94). I was led to ponder this particular passage by Ingo Swann, the noted US exponent of Remote Viewing, who quotes it in one of his writings. The chapter itself, for anyone who knows anything at all about Remote Viewing, is powerfully suggestive. But the comments (which really need to be read in full to be properly savored) add even more. The first comment which struck me was that of Su Ch'e, who tells us that "The reason the sages of the past understood everything without going anywhere was simply because they kept their natures whole" (page 94). The second remarkable comment was that of Ch'eng Hsuan Ying, which reads in part: "'without trying' means to focus the spirit on the tranquility that excels at making things happen" (page 95). But doesn't all this suggest that superpowers, as Ingo Swann asserts, are part of everyone's inheritance as a human being? Doesn't it also suggest a getting in touch with the Collective Unconsciousness? the Universal Mind? The ONE? The TAO? And isn't this in fact what Remote Viewers such as Ingo Swann have rediscovered today? Have we, in other words, finally begun to re-acquire something of the lost Wisdom of the Ancients...? It would certainly seem so to me. Besides the excellent translation and valuable commentaries, Red Pine has thoughtfully given us, printed vertically alongside the English translation, the Chinese text in full form characters. This text, it should be noted, is the translator's

own new and original recension, and is based on a careful study of the many extant editions of the Tao Te Ching including that discovered at Mawangtui in 1973. Red Pine's edition also comes with a map; an informative 12-page historical introduction; several interesting photographs among which is one of the Mawangtui text; and a very full bilingual glossary of Chinese names and terms. My one criticism is that, although Red Pine often refers us to specific lines (e.g., "In line sixteen..."), line numbers have not been printed alongside either the English or the Chinese texts and it can sometimes take time to locate the line he's talking about. Although intended for a popular readership, Red Pine's edition, which I believe was out-of-print for a while, is certainly scholarly in the best sense of the word. The wise would be well advised to snap up a copy before it goes out-of-print again. It may be the only Tao Te Ching you will ever need.

In Asia, sacred texts like the Tao Te Ching are read with reference to the commentaries of its key historical luminaries. Only in the west is it read by itself, with no guidance. Finally, we have a TTC with key commentaries. Plus, the author has here given a translation that may come as close as possible to expressing the Chinese in English. It is concise, even pithy. A number of other features make this volume unique and particularly valuable. Pine's extensive introduction covers an intriguing linguistic insight into the Chinese written character for Tao, Lao Tzu's historical background, the usual issues of authorship, etc., and some of the deeper understandings of the important themes of philosophical Taoism. Also, he has provided black and white photos of the famed Hanku Pass and the Loukuantai where tradition holds that Lao-tzu wrote the Tao Te Ching. The Chinese text is provided along side Pine's clear and unadorned translation. He utilizes the earlier but more recently discovered Mawangtui texts, and explains his preferences in choosing among textual variants. But most important for me, and for any student of the Tao Te Ching are his carefully selected commentaries which follow each verse. These show how the Chinese have traditionally understood the passages of the TTC in selected commentaries from the last 2000 years. Also, the book provides an extensive glossary of the Chinese terms and the commentators. Highly recommended!

As every reader of Lao Tzu's magnum opus is well aware, there is perhaps no other work produced by the human mind which has appeared in as many translations, quasi-translations, pseudo-translations, non-translations and mistranslations as Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching. Why then, the reader will wonder, do we need yet another? Because, with the possible exception of Prof. Mair's excellent rendering, there is none other comparable to this one. Red Pine is no dabbler in

these matters. A quick reading of the Introduction (which, with its photographs is itself worth the price of the book) should convince the reader of that. But the book offers even more than a lucid translation of the ancient classic (and it IS a translation, not a paraphrase of someone else's): there is a bonus on every page, a judicious selection of commentaries from ancient writers, who have interpreted the verses, and have found in them a source of inspiration which readers have acknowledged over the past two millennia. If you decide to buy only one translation of Tao Te Ching, you won't be disappointed if this is the one you choose. Justin Thacker, Los Angeles, California

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