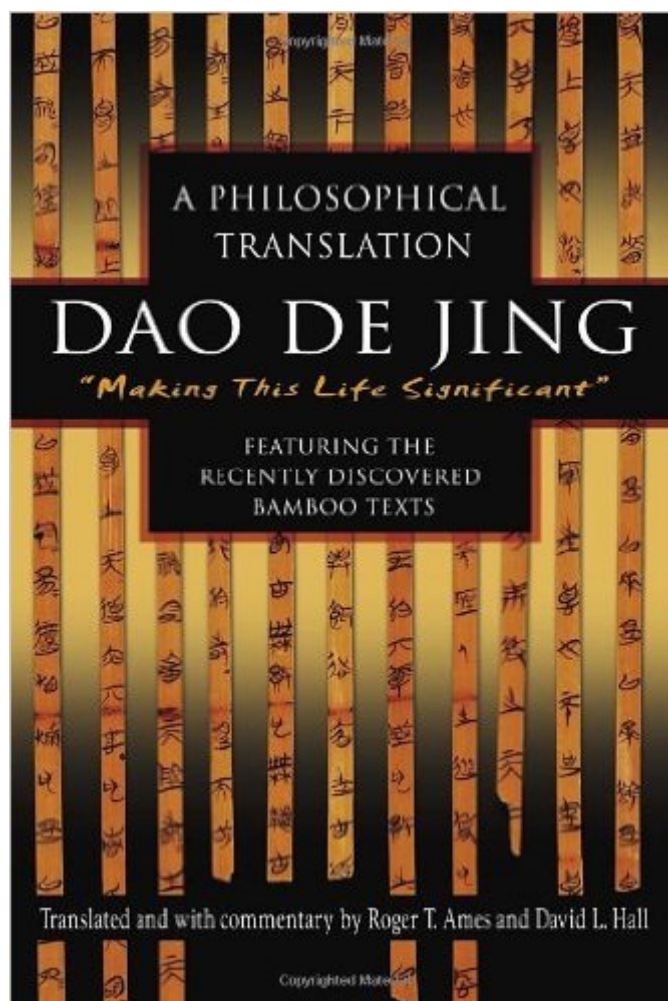


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Dao De Jing: A Philosophical Translation (English And Mandarin Chinese Edition)



Synopsis

In 1993, archaeologists unearthed a set of ancient bamboo scrolls that contained the earliest known version of the Dao de jing. Composed more than two thousand years ago, this life-changing document offers a regimen of self-cultivation to attain personal excellence and revitalize moral behavior. Now in this luminous new translation, renowned China scholars Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall bring the timeless wisdom of the Dao de jing into our contemporary world. In this elegant volume, Ames and Hall feature the original Chinese texts of the Dao de jing and translate them into crisp, chiseled English that reads like poetry. Each of the eighty-one brief chapters is followed by clear, thought-provoking commentary exploring the layers of meaning in the text. This new version of one of the world's most influential documents will stand as both a compelling introduction to Daoist thought and as the classic modern English translation.

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Customer Reviews

I am now in my third decade of Taijiquan and Qigong play. I teach both of these Chinese forms. I have 14 different translations of the Dao De Jing, four of the Art of Warfare and five of the I Jing. For many years, I have been trying to make sense of the variations in translation. My experiences -- physical, mental and spiritual - from taijiquan and qigong have not always been congruent with my "rational" understanding of the written works. Roger Ames translations of the Dao De Jung, Yuan Dao and SunZi has dramatically changed everything. Ames has done what no one else has done. He has attempted to understand the Daoist writings within the classical Chinese mode of thought

and then translate that into English without the accompanying Western dualistic (Cartesian) baggage that has imbued all previous translations. Ames insights into classical Chinese "cosmology, ontology and epistemology are exemplary and amazingly revealing. No previous translation had achieved his depth of insight. I am indebted to Roger for these wonderful translations and explications of traditional Daoist thinking and being. My "new" understanding of Daoist being in the world or as Roger says, "way-making", has allowed completely new insights and abilities to emerge from my taijiquan and qigong. Anyone who has an interest in Daoism can do nothing better than to obtain copies of Ames Dao De Jing, Yuan Dao, Sunzi and Thinking from the Han. You will be, as I am, delighted with the concept of the Wu-forms and the idea that much of the Dao De Jing derives from traditional folks songs. Imagine singing or chanting the Dao! This connects, sympathetically, for me at least, to Australian songlines and to Dineh "harmony & beauty". Ames work is essential reading for anyone who hopes to understand the classical Chinese worldview and become realized.

Every translation tells you "what" the translator thinks the book should be saying, but only this one actually tells you "why" those words are presented the way they are. This book stands out as an example of what Ames calls the "self-consciously interpretive" style of commentary. (Hall died before the book was finished. So Ames had the last say in this book.) This style is developed out of the belief that "any pretense to a literal translation is not only naive, but is itself a cultural prejudice of the first order." (Preface, p. xi) To neutralize prejudices, the translation of every chapter is immediately followed by a commentary, which serves as a "meta-translation" to reflect on translation and editing issues from the social background at the time of the writing of Tao Te Ching, to the tension among ideas from different traditions and across chapters. My experience tells me that one either hates or loves this kind of fragmentary, hoop-jumping, stop-and-go lecturing style. However, to me it is very close to that of the vast majority of annotations in classical Chinese scriptures. I find it quite convenient for referencing verses and ideas. So I am perfectly comfortable with (and even welcome) this format of presentation. Also, the authors' professional training in philosophy gives them the edge in presenting the kinds of problems that the ancient Taoists were trying to deal with and analyzing the flow of ideas. What some people may see as "pedantic" commentaries and footnotes actually challenged me to re-evaluate the aims and strategies of those Taoist projects. For that I thank the authors for their great services. But it does not necessarily mean that this style suits everyone (or every purpose). However, whether you like this book or not, you have to give credits to the authors for being serious down to the most minute details, such as whether the presence of a connective "gu" (footnote 42, pp. 103, 207-208), "shiyi" (p. 10), or "yici" (p. 108) would entail the

concatenation of successive chapters. Also, their text is mainly based on the archaeological findings at Mawangdui (168 BCE, discovered 1973) and Guodian (c. 300 BCE, discovered 1993) and the authoritative commentary of Wang Bi (27-91 CE). Throughout the book, fine points are cross-referenced to multiple expert opinions. In my opinion, any cost to this all-encompassing approach should be compensated by the authenticity and the quality of information given our current state of knowledge. Of course, one may insist that a translation should be nothing more than a translation. However, I beg to differ in this particular situation. Casual readers may not realize that Tao Te Ching actually has no standard version. Not that it has no standard translation in English, but rather that there is not even a single "original" text in Chinese that everyone can confidently identify as the writing of Lao Tsu. Every edition has something unique. Since the grammar of ancient Chinese is often-- and perhaps way, way too often-- too flexible for stable interpretation, any addition, omission, alteration, and even partition of key words can and do radically change the meaning of the same sentence (or what people think should be the same sentence) across editions. Needless to say, this posts a lot of difficulties for the readers. Every editor of Tao Te Ching had tried to "correct" his predecessors' "mistakes", only to generate yet other new confusion and controversy. Worse, without a historically accurate and philosophically coherent context, any "poetic" translation of Tao Te Ching that most people prefer can easily degenerate into wishful thinking on mysticism. The authors cannot (and did not claim to) stop the divergence in interpretations of the text, but they did try in good faith to be open and honest about it. They even adopt a dual translation system such that a hard-to-translate concept is given a literal approximation followed by a sound translation in parenthesis. Thus, even for a supposedly "simple" word like Tao, the book would translate it as "way-making (dao)". (Dao is the latinized translation of Tao. The latter was based on a different phonetic system.) For beginners, this practice may sound silly. But as you study more and more versions, you may come to appreciate what the authors had done. In conclusion, I think this book should appeal to people who are interested in knowing what Lao Tsu "really" said (or what the early Taoists were supposed to be saying). Even though this book does not have the final answers, it is still a reasonable place to start. However, as most reviewers would probably agree, I would not look for poetic awe or spiritual enlightenment in this piece of scholarly work because those are simply not the primary objectives of this book.

I have read, and enjoyed, numerous translations of the Daodejing (some numerous times), but reading this translation has been a revelation. This is not a translation for the neophyte, or for those unwilling or unable to tackle some hearty philosophical discussion. But if you are a serious student

of the Daodejing (not necessarily an academic), then reading this translation is a must. My general sense is that Ames and Hall have succeeded in their translation because they have managed to combine mature wisdom and serious philosophical insight. Translating the Daodejing into English is an extraordinarily difficult task that requires bridging a vast chasm between ancient China and the modern West, and this translation seems to have pulled this off about as well as it can be done (at least so far). Some specific features of the translation that make it stand out: (a) a worthy historical introduction, (b) an outstanding philosophical introduction, which by itself makes the book more than worth the price, (c) a worthy glossary of key terms, which appropriately avoids the "fallacy of the perfect dictionary", (d) a lively and accurate translation of the Daodejing itself, (e) with each passage/chapter accompanied by the translators' commentary, (f) a thematic index. I am enjoying this book immensely ... I can't recommend it highly enough.

Ames and Hall have pulled in the often-neglected cosmological origins of the DDJ, inspired by strips found with the Guodian strips. The authors have been meticulous in picking through the intricacies of some fairly complex terms in a thorough, yet succinct, way. I really really like the holistic perspective in the authors' interpretation of the verses. Instead of feeling like I'm being preached at from the pulpit, it feels like I'm sitting at a table over coffee and listening. It is with great sorrow that I read of Hall's passing. Knowing this team of writers will collaborate no more makes me sad.

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