

**Major, John S., Sarah A. Queen, Andrew Seth Meyer, and Harold D. Roth (translators and editors), *The Huainanzi, A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China of Liu An, King of Huainan*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, xi + 986 pages and Major, John S., Sarah A. Queen, Andrew Seth Meyer, and Harold D. Roth (translators and editors), *The Essential Huainanzi of Liu An, King of Huainan*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012, vii + 252 pages**

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Of the two books under review, I shall focus on the first one, which is a complete translation of the *Huainanzi*. Since the second book is an abridgment of it, what I say about the first applies to the second. I shall comment very briefly on the second one at the end of this review.

This work is the first complete English translation of *The Huainanzi* (fl. 139 BCE)—the text that LIU An, the king of Huainan, purportedly presented to Emperor Wu. It must be pointed out that this book is the work of a team. On the title page, the translators and editors also give Michael Puett and Judson Murray credit for their contributions, especially as co-translators of chapters 13 and 21. This translation is a testament to the development of Han studies over the past 40 years, and it will be the authoritative translation for some time to come. After a three-page acknowledgment, the text contains a forty-page introduction, a translation of the twenty-one chapters, an appendix on the “Key Chinese Terms and Their Translations,” an appendix listing “Categorical Terms” and a final appendix offering “A Concise Textual History of the *Huainanzi* and a Bibliography of *Huainanzi* Studies.”

The introduction provides a concise and comprehensive overview to the text. The introduction is divided into eight sections with more subdivisions. The first section, entitled “The early Han background to the *Huainanzi*, the history, politics, and competing images of empire,” examines how the early Han emperors dealt with the uncertainties of dynastic succession. A debate raged during the reign of Emperor Jing (157–141 BCE)

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over how strongly centralized or decentralized the imperial court's government should be. As the court was leaning toward centralization, LIU An's work tried to offer a balanced view leaning toward decentralization. The second section, "LIU An and the *Huainanzi*," situates the King of Huainan in the imperial family's struggle for power. The editors build a good case that LIU An wrote the text for Emperor Jing but then had to present it to Emperor Wu after he was enthroned. They also argue convincingly that the modern redactions are descendants of the 21 chapter text presented to Emperor Wu. LIU An's favor with the court waned. He may have been involved in a conspiracy. He had a copy of the imperial seal made for his own use. LIU An committed suicide before he was to be arrested in 122 BCE. His principal wife and heir were executed.

The next section of the introduction, "The content and organization of the *Huainanzi*," is subdivided into three parts. First, in "The Organization of the Text" the editors turn to chapter 21, "An Overview of the Essentials," that describes the content, purpose, and arrangement of the chapters. Second, in "The Structure of the Work: Roots and Branches," the editors borrow and expand on the roots and branches metaphor presented in chapter 21 to further elaborate on how the first eight chapters establish the abstract and general guiding images or roots from which the subsequent chapters sprout like branches to discuss the daily, mundane affairs of applying the general ideas and providing illustrations of them. The *Huainanzi* reveals its debt to the *Laozi's* twofold structure of the Way and its application. In the third subsection, entitled "The Claims the *Huainanzi* Makes for Itself," the text again asserts its binary—the Way and its Potency—structure, clarifying their relation to human life and successful governance. In proposing that the *Huainanzi* contains the guiding light for proper governance, LIU An presented himself as an equal to the Duke of Zhou or Confucius.

In the next section of the introduction, "The place of the *Huainanzi* in early Han history," the editors make four points that situate the text within its context. First, the *Huainanzi* advocates for a decentralized form of government exemplified in the ancient golden age of the three dynasties. Second, the text attributes the demise of good government and the kingly way to meddling scholar-officials who have severed familial ties among the imperial family, especially the Son of Heaven and his "flesh and bone" relatives in the fiefs such as LIU An. Third, the text presents its integral, unifying perspective as the correct means by which to comprehend all other perspectives, texts, and forms of governing. Fourth, the *Huainanzi* also presents the proper manner in which to interpret and integrate the five Confucian classics. Creating unity out of what had appeared to be irreconcilable diversity solved both the intellectual and the political challenges of the day, which undoubtedly further alienated LIU An from the imperial court and its scholar-officials.

In the section "Sources of the *Huainanzi*," the editors want again to emphasize that the text is not a mere collection of materials, that it does have a discernible structure, organization, and coherent philosophical outlook. They note that more than 800 quotes come from other sources. The *Zhuangzi*, the *Lüshi Chunqiu*, the *Laozi*, and the *Hanfeizi* are the four most quoted sources. Passages are quoted from many of the leading pre-Qin texts. In "The Debate over the Intellectual Affiliation of the *Huainanzi*," the editors argue against trying to pigeonhole the text with one label. They review attempts to explain the classification of the *Huainanzi* as a *Zajia* text. They nicely summarize the arguments to classify it as a Daoist or Huang-Lao text, looking briefly at some of the counter criticism. They examine the eclectic interpretation and then link that view to various views that reject

the eclectic view, arguing for a comprehensive treatises that unites competing doctrines. In the end the editors accept the *Huainanzi's* own claim that it is above and beyond classification. The section "A Brief Account of this Translation Project" describes how the team was formed and what their translation objectives were. The introduction concludes with "Conventions Used in the Work," which discusses how chapter sections were determined, the format, and typography for parallel prose and verse lines, the arrangement of the chapters and the appendices, their use of five nonstandard Romanizations, and how they manage various citations.

The chapters containing the translations begin with respective introductions to help orientate the reader. Each chapter introduction begins with a general statement about the chapter, discusses in detail the chapter title provides a "summary and key themes," discusses literary "sources" that the original authors quoted or paraphrased, and offers a statement about how the chapter fits into the context of the *Huainanzi* as a whole. The translations are extensively footnoted on each page. They are outstanding in every way. The translators have attempted to preserve the prose and the poetry of the original. They do not attempt to preserve the rhyme in the English translation nor do they end rhymed lines with a Romanized character or a symbolic code or number. They do indent the poetry so the reader develops a sense of the poetic prose being employed. The translations are completed in a high level literary fashion that models the original. They are fluid and enjoyable to read.

Allow me to show a comparison between the new translation and D.C. Lau's and Roger T. Ames's translation from *Yuan Dao: Tracing Dao to Its Source* (Ballantine Books, 1998) of a brief passage from chapter one. This is from the new translation:

That which is tranquil from our birth is our heavenly nature. Stirring only after being stimulated, our nature is harmed. When things arise and the spirit responds, this is the activity of perception. When perception comes into contact with things, preferences arise. When preferences take shape and perception is enticed by external things, our nature cannot return to the self, and the heavenly patterns are destroyed. (53)

It is interesting to note that the translators do not put the above passage in verse form as Lau and Ames do. Lau and Ames' translation of this passage reads:

A man is quiescent when born—[41]  
 This is the Heaven-endowed nature. [41]  
 He moves when aroused—[42]  
 This is the stirring of that nature. [42]  
 The human spirit responds when things come on the scene—  
 This is the movement of the intellect. [42]  
 When the intellect comes into contact with things,  
 Feelings of attraction and aversion are produced. [43]  
 Where these feelings of attraction and aversion have taken shape, [43]  
 And the intellect has been enticed from the outside, [44]  
 One is unable to return to himself,  
 And the Heavenly principles in him are destroyed. [44]  
 (*Yuan Dao: Tracing Dao to Its Source*, 73; the numbers indicate lines that rhyme with each other.)

Students of the history of philosophy, intellectual history, and the history of religions should be interested in having access to a complete translation of the *Huainanzi* because it articulates the development of Early Han dynasty Daoism. Even though LIU An and his co-authors proposed that the text superseded any standard bibliographic classification such as Daoism or Confucianism, the *Huainanzi* is based on and extensively quotes earlier sources that are classified as Daoism, and it has been accepted by the later developments of Daoist religio-philosophy as a seminal text. If students wanted to gain some insight into the Early Han debate to centralize the imperial authority, then they would first turn to DONG Zhongshu's *Chunqiu Fanlu*. If they wanted to study the counter position to decentralize that authority, then they should read the *Huainanzi*. The importance of the *Huainanzi* as a revolutionary or subversive document cannot be overstated, as is evidenced in the ultimate demise of LIU An and his family.

Let me now turn to the second book under review, *The Essential Huainanzi*, which provides an abridgment of the complete translation. It begins with a two page outline sketch of key historical dates; a short version of the introduction; abridged versions of all 21 chapters; a glossary of personal names; a brief bibliography; and an index. Each chapter of *The Essential Huainanzi* contains about 20 to 30 % of the original translation without the extensive footnotes. *The Essential Huainanzi* could be used, affordably, for student course work. I highly recommend both texts to potential readers.