The Tao of Seduction consists of two texts on ancient Taoist sexual alchemy, discovered while excavating the Mawangdui archaeological site in Hunan province. Lin Liao Yi, a specialist in Chinese literature and philosophy, has translated and commented on this two-thousand-year-old treatise on ancient Chinese ways of love, which teaches the art of “nourishing life.” The first of these texts is a series of questions, from the emperor to his high functionaries, concerning Taoist precepts for enjoying a healthy and spiritual sex life. For example, the advisors recommend breathing only five times through the mouth during lovemaking to energize the members of the body. In addition, this portion of the book includes recipes for erotic dishes such as pan-fried beef, tea with dates and eggs, and sheep’s kidney. The second half of the book is illustrated with sexual positions, including the tiger’s ballad, the grasshopper’s landing, the caterpillar on a stem, the Phoenix's takeoff, and others. This title is bound in the style of a traditional Chinese text, along with a lavish casing.

My Personal Review:
This gorgeous book reproduces many specimens of erotic painting from China's 17th to 19th centuries, all taken from the Bertholet collection. Most reproductions fill an entire page, clearly presenting the players and their play. Although the basics of human coupling never change, these paintings all present a happy, consensual tone that's all too often missing from Western erotica.

The text does a lot to explain that affectionate tone. Extracts from Chinese classics of Taoism and medicine show how sexual energy was integrated into wider range of beliefs, spanning the range from earthy and pragmatic to esoterics of religion and alchemy. Most of the texts address a male readership, prescribing sexual exercises that enrich the man's energies by tapping into female sources. The man's rituals can not be complete without the woman's full arousal, however, so significant parts of the text describe the stages of her arousal and techniques for engaging it to the fullest.
Clearly, that requires the happy cooperation we see in the beautiful reproductions of people engaged in reproduction.

Although the imagery and text both offer plenty to enjoy, both have appeared elsewhere before. Nearly all of the paintings presented in this book also appear in Dreams of Spring, an earlier sampling of the Bertholet collection's Chinese holdings. Most of the text has also appeared in Art of the Bedchamber, often in more complete forms. Any collector who already owns both of those books will find little new here. That takes nothing away from this book in itself, though. The lush and distinctively non-Western look will charm many readers, and the translations will open doors to a culture of sexuality completely free of Puritan contamination.

-- wiredweird

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