

PAPERBOUNDS

A CHINESE PIONEER FAMILY: The Lins of Wu-feng, Taiwan 1729-1895. By Johanna Menzel Meskill. Princeton, 1987. 375 pp. \$12.50

A tale of mayhem and murder emerges from the documents of the Lin family, wealthy Chinese landowners of Taiwan. Their story illuminates the rough frontier life on the island, China's wild East. Arriving from the mainland in 1754, the Lins wrested land from the natives and prospered until 1786, when Taiwan's Chinese rebelled against the Manchu Dynasty. Caught in this failed uprising, patriarch Lin Shih saw his land confiscated, his family dispossessed. Regaining their fortune over the next half century, the Lins became local strongmen. During the Taiping rebellion of 1859-63, Lin Wen-cha took his personal army to the mainland to fight on the side of the Manchus. Upon his return he massacred his neighbors and seized their lands. The brother who succeeded him was also a buccaneer—until he was ambushed and killed by a cabal of local officials, who charged him posthumously with inciting rebellion. Dragged into court, the surviving Lins mounted a vigorous defense, fearing a conviction that would mean death or castration for the men, slavery for the women. After 12 years, the litigation ended in compromise. The Lin family—now respectable gentry—kept their land until the 1950s, when reforms pushed them to seek careers in new fields: insurance and banking.

THE LAST DALAI LAMA, A Biography. By Michael Harris Goodman. Shambhala, 1987. 364 pp. \$15.95

The Dalai Lama is not Tibet, nor Tibet the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th of that line, modestly concedes. But as British historian Goodman shows, the Buddhist people of "the Land of Snows" disagree. As the incarnation of the Bodhisattva of Mercy and Compassion and Tibet's patron

saint, Gyatso is his nation's spiritual—and ostensibly political—leader. In 1950, the Chinese "liberated" the "Roof of the World" from Western imperialists (there were six expatriate Europeans in Tibet at the time). "Assimilating" the one million Tibetans, they killed thousands, pillaged temples, and destroyed records of Tibet as a sovereign state. The "God-King" later fled to India, where he awaits signs to return. "Nations that suffer the most—here the Jewish people come to mind—become the toughest," he says. Why, then, the *last* Dalai Lama? Gyatso himself dismisses a prophecy that he is his line's end. "As long as there is suffering in the world, I shall be back." Whether "I return as Dalai Lama is unimportant."

ALLEGORY AND THE MIGRATION OF SYMBOLS. By Rudolf Wittkower. Norton, 1987. 223 pp. \$14.95

Berlin-born art historian Rudolf Wittkower (1901-71) forged his reputation with brilliant scholarship on the Italian baroque, including a classic text on 18th-century Italian art and architecture. But his studies took him far beyond those geographic and chronological limits. These 14 essays, first published between 1937 and 1972, explore a theme that long engaged Wittkower: the meanderings of symbols and their meanings from culture to culture. He traces, for example, the motif of an eagle fighting a serpent from its origins in the earliest Mesopotamian civilizations, where it represented the cosmic combat of light and darkness, to the late 18th century, when William Blake used it in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* as a metaphor for the imagination at war with earthly dullness. Wittkower also deals with such topics as monsters, allegorical figures of the Renaissance (Time, Death, Virtue) and their later mutations, and the basic problem of art—"whether and how far the visual symbol in art can yield its meaning to the interpreting beholder."