



# The East, the West, and Sex: A History of Erotic Encounters

*Richard Bernstein*

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## **The East, the West, and Sex: A History of Erotic Encounters** Richard Bernstein

A rich and seductive narrative of the powerful erotic pull the East has always had for the West—a pervasive yet often ignored aspect of their long historical relationship—and a deep exploration of the intimate connection between sex and power.

Richard Bernstein defines the East widely—northern Africa, the Middle East, Asia, the Pacific Islands—and frames it as a place where sexual pleasure was not commonly associated with sin, as it was in the West, and where a different sexual culture offered the Western men who came as conquerers and traders thrilling but morally ambiguous opportunities that were mostly unavailable at home. Bernstein maps this erotic history through a chronology of notable personalities. Here are some of Europe's greatest literary personalities and explorers: Marco Polo, writing on the harem of Kublai Khan; Gustave Flaubert, describing his dalliances with Egyptian prostitutes (and the diseases he picked up along the way); and Richard Francis Burton, adventurer, lothario, anthropologist—and translator of *The Arabian Nights*.

Here also are those figures less well-known but with stories no less captivating or surprising: Europeans whose “temporary marriages” to Japanese women might have inspired Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*; rare visitors to the boudoirs of Chinese emperors in the Forbidden City; American G.I.s and journalists in Vietnam discovering the sexual emoluments of postcolonial power; men attracted to the sex bazaars of yesterday's North Africa and the Thailand of today. And throughout, Bernstein explores the lives of those women who suffered for or profited from the fantasies of Western men.

A remarkable work of history: as unexpected as it is lucid, and as provocative as it is brilliantly illuminating.

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