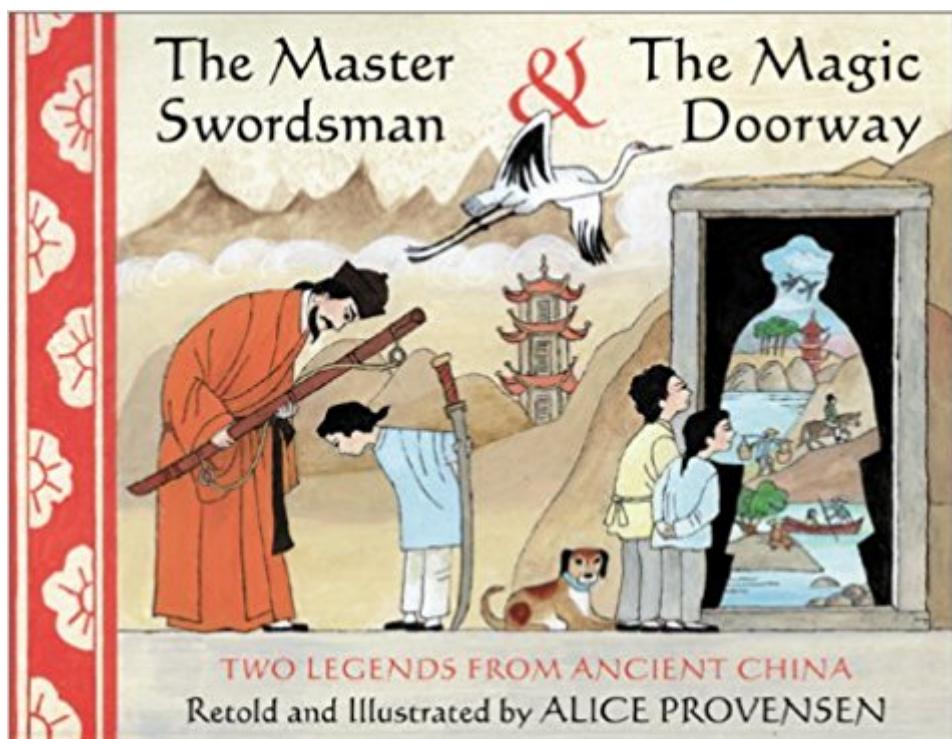


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# The Master Swordsman & The Magic Doorway: Two Legends From Ancient China



## **Synopsis**

Little Chu wants to defend his family and protect the village from bandits. He apprentices with Master Li, the greatest teacher of the sword in all of China -- and finds that having the skill means he'll never have to use it. When the Emperor sees Mu Chi's magnificent mural, he decrees that the painter's reward shall be death. After all, no one but the Emperor should own such a perfect painting. Wielding the power of art, Mu Chi is able to find a way out of his dilemma. These two stories about masters of their arts are retold and illustrated by Caldecott Medalist Alice Provensen, a master artist in her own right. Readers and listeners will be enchanted by the humor and irrepressible spirit with which these characters take on obstacles and triumph over them.

## **Book Information**

Age Range: 5 - 8 years

Lexile Measure: 450L (What's this?)

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Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 4 customer reviews

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## **Customer Reviews**

Two inspiring tales of paradox from the Middle Kingdom captivate Caldecott winner Provensen (The Glorious Flight; A Visit to William Blake's Inn). In the first, the Master, who maintains that he no longer teaches, trains his apprentice Little Chu in an unorthodox way to develop the lightning instincts that will make the boy an extraordinary swordsman. In exquisitely timed painted panels, Provensen chronicles the boy's improving skills until one day Little Chu successfully dodges the Master's sword and the man bequeaths to him the weapon and releases him from service ("You will never need to draw it. No enemy can touch you. Use the sword to chop cabbage"). In the second

tale, a greedy emperor commissions a great wall painting by Mu Chi, then plots to behead him so that the artist can never top his work for the emperor. But the painter outsmarts the ruler. Taken together, the tales contrast the outcome of generosity versus parsimony. Both the action-packed panels in the first story and the spreads in the second contain traditional Chinese motifs; the paintings never lose their simplicity of line and narrative clarity. Oil painting on cream-colored vellum and calligraphy-like type add to the feeling of ageless calm. These magic tales with impeccable visual pacing prove once again that Provensen is a master storyteller and a consummate artist.

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K-Gr 3-A distinguished illustrator uses the China she imagines as a setting for two philosophical fantasies. Though the stories are described as "legends from ancient China- retold," the CIP information is more accurate, categorizing the book as fiction rather than folklore. In the first story, a small boy from a village beset by bandits travels far to apprentice himself to a master swordsman. After two years of dodging talking objects like jugs and teapots, Little Chu learns to be attentive and alert, to anticipate danger. Master Li then presents him with his great sword and tells him to use it to chop cabbage. The bandits are so daunted by his skillful chopping of vegetables that they leave the village in peace. The second story concerns the conflict between a great painter and a greedy, cruel emperor. Commissioned to fill a huge, blank wall, the artist spends years painting a mural, knowing that the jealous emperor will kill him when he is finished. His solution to the problem, while echoing many Chinese stories about a picture coming to life, is not a traditional one. Although Provensen tells a good story in crisp, dramatic sentences, her stock characters engage in overly formal dialogue and have been placed in whimsical situations that exist only in the Western imagination. Her art pays respectful homage to Chinese narrative hand scrolls, and her sense of composition, color, and narrative flow are products of her distinguished career. Nonetheless, Emily Arnold McCully's *Beautiful Warrior* (Scholastic, 1998) and Molly Bang's *Tye May and the Magic Brush* (Morrow, 1992) are more authentic and accurate depictions of China. Margaret A. Chang, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, North Adams

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great!

Here is a book that can appeal to a variety of ages and stages. There is much intellectual treasure to be mined from this source as well as some great nuggets of entertainment and wisdom. Concepts

of Eastern philosophy (such as awareness, inner nature, observation, humility, patience, balance, respect, honor, trust, mastership, the virtue of the small) and universal themes (such as hunger, poverty, hard work, greed, ambition, power, hero's journey, failure, success, magic, art, fight, flight) are woven into a fine tapestry of adventure and intrigue. The book contains two stories: "The Master Swordsman" and "The Magic Doorway." Each independent story celebrates (and teaches) the uses of intellect, preparation, and ingenuity over rash acts, cruelty, and violence. The main characters persevere in their individual challenges because they follow paths to peaceable resolutions to their problems. The rich illustrations are beautifully wrought and reminiscent of Chinese landscape paintings / art; several of them include Chinese characters. It's quite amusing to see an exclamation mark after these as well! This book would make a great addition to any study of Chinese culture, thought, art, language, legends, and folklore. It is an appropriate product for reading circles and discussion related to personal / family values.

This is the kind of book I enjoyed as a child and still find delightful as an adult. Two simple stories, funny yet with a message, great for kids. The drawings splash across the pages in full color, with animals, bandits, and landscapes that make the text come to life.

Light and magical book bringing eternal human values in a way accessible to children. The stories are imbued with magic that engages the imagination of children and adults alike.

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