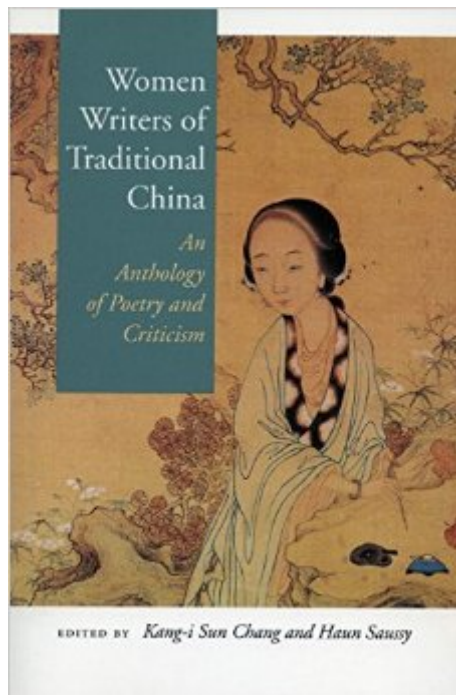


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Women Writers Of Traditional China: An Anthology Of Poetry And Criticism



Synopsis

This anthology of Chinese women's poetry in translation brings together representative selections from the work of some 130 poets from the Han dynasty to the early twentieth century. To measure the development of Chinese women's poetry, one must take into account not only the poems but also the prose writings—prefaces, biographies, theoretical tracts—that framed them and attempted to shape women's writing as a distinct category of literature. To this end, the anthology contains an extended section of criticism by and about women writers. These poets include empresses, imperial concubines, courtesans, grandmothers, recluses, Buddhist nuns, widows, painters, farm wives, revolutionaries, and adolescent girls thought to be incarnate immortals. Some women wrote out of isolation and despair, finding in words a mastery that otherwise eluded them. Others were recruited into poetry by family members, friends, or sympathetic male advocates. Some dwelt on intimate family matters and cast their poems as addresses to husbands and sons at large in the wide world of men's affairs. Each woman had her own reasons for poetry and her own ways of appropriating, and often changing, the conventions of both men's and women's verse. The primary purpose of this anthology is to put before the English-speaking reader evidence of the poetic talent that flourished, against all odds, among women in premodern China. It is also designed to spur reflection among specialists in Chinese poetry, inspiring new perspectives on both the Chinese poetic tradition and the canon of female poets within that tradition. This partial history both connects with and departs from the established patterns for women's writing in the West, thus complementing current discussions of feminine writing.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This anthology has been long in coming and long needed. An impressive accomplishment from a number of perspectives, its 891 pages are organized into two sections, Part One: Poetry, pages 1-666, and Part Two, Criticism, 667-804, and followed by extensive notes and an impressive bibliography of the Chinese and English Languages sources for the selection. Each section is then organized chronologically by Chinese dynasty so that the reader can flip from the Poetry to the Criticism within a particular dynasty. Within each section, there are both short biographies of the authors and selections from the poetry of more than 150 women, with critical notes. Thus the anthology offers a wealth of literary and historical information and a breadth of coverage for translations of the many Women poets of China that has not been seen in the past. The anthology ends with the early 20th century, and represents largely poetry written in classical or literary Chinese. While some of these poets have appeared in general anthologies of Chinese poetry, and will be well known to scholars in the field, there has never been such a comprehensive work in English before this one. I was delighted to discover among my old favorites like the empress Wu Zetian and the Sung poetess Li Qingzhao, large numbers of female poets, especially from the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) through the beginning of the republican period in China (1911). It was also delightful to find that the criticism of some of these poets, and male counterparts who commented on women's poetry, were translated, many for the first time.

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