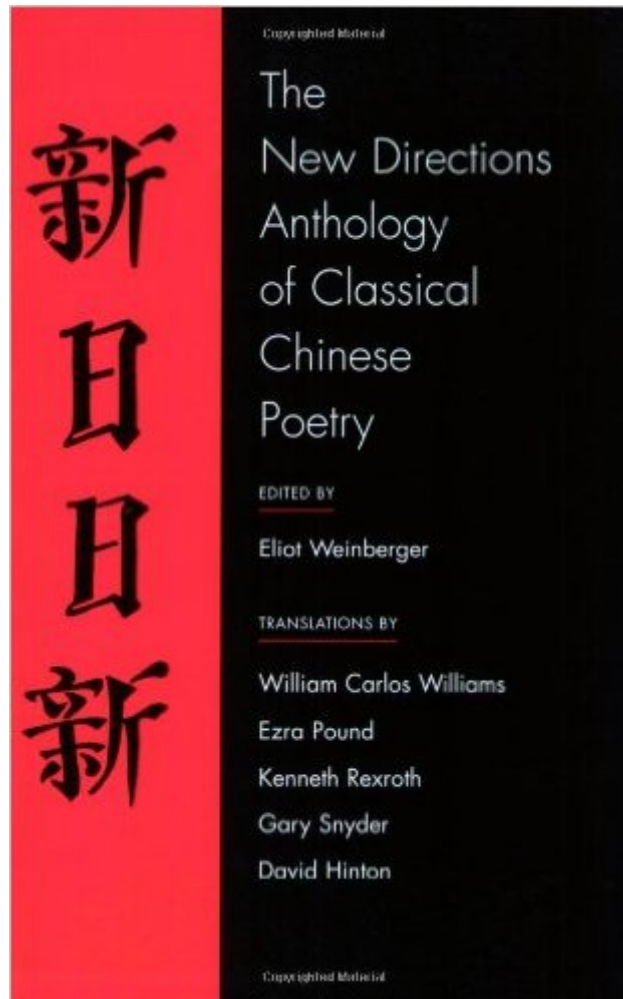


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The New Directions Anthology Of Classical Chinese Poetry



Synopsis

A groundbreaking anthology of classical Chinese translations by giants of Modern American poetry. A rich compendium of translations, *The New Directions Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry* is the first collection to look at Chinese poetry through its enormous influence on American poetry. Weinberger begins with Ezra Pound's *Cathay* (1915), and includes translations by three other major U.S. poets; William Carlos Williams, Kenneth Rexroth, Gary Snyder; and an important poet-translator-scholar, David Hinton, all of whom have long been associated with New Directions. Moreover, it is the first general anthology ever to consider the process of translation by presenting different versions of the same poem by various translators, as well as examples of the translators rewriting themselves. The collection, at once playful and instructive, serves as an excellent introduction to the art and tradition of Chinese poetry, gathering some 250 poems by nearly 40 poets. The anthology also includes previously uncollected translations by Pound; a selection of essays on Chinese poetry by all five translators, some never published before in book form; Lu Chi's famous "Rhymeprose on Literature" translated by Achilles Fang; biographical notes that are a collage of poems and comments by both the American translators and the Chinese poets themselves; and also Weinberger's excellent introduction that historically contextualizes the influence Chinese poetry has had on the work of American poets.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The rediscovery of Greek and Roman literature kickstarted the Renaissance in Europe. In a similar way, though on a somewhat smaller scale, the conveniently Imagist makeover of Chinese poetry by Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell undoubtedly had a seismic and far-reaching effect on later 20th century American poetry. In his learned Introduction to this outstanding and indispensable Anthology, Weinberger traces the many subsequent debts owed by a galaxy of fine American poets to that seminal work of re-invention. Such impressively talented scholar-translators as Burton Watson, J. P. Seaton, Jonathan Chaves and several others receive an honourable mention, though their work is well anthologised elsewhere, and Weinberger's brief seems to have been only to include full-time poets: with the possible exception of Hinton, that is. (However, Sam Hamill's, Arthur Sze's and David Young's names have inexplicably been left out: all three of them marvellous contemporary re-interpreters of the classical Chinese tradition, and all three fine poets in their own right.) Weinberger concentrates in particular on five exemplary writers: Ezra Pound himself, William Carlos Williams, Kenneth Rexroth, Gary Snyder, and David Hinton. They are certainly all major figures, and it's useful to have them grouped together in this way (particular since the last of them diverges in such interesting ways from the Imagist 'Less is More' tradition: though he certainly 'makes it new' in accordance with that central dictum, which is even quoted in the original Chinese characters both on the cover and on the titlepage).

This is a superb anthology several times over. First and foremost, it brings together in one book several centuries of the finest classical poetry from China, starting at the beginning with selections from "The Book of Odes" and drawing a finish line at the end of the Sung Dynasty in 1279. Pretty much all the major poets from the T'ang and Sung are represented here along with earlier masters like T'ao Ch'ien and many interesting lesser-known figures throughout. And in line with New Directions' general attitude that poems should sound like poems, the translations here all flow musically and ring harmoniously in the mind's ear. Still, there are many other excellent anthologies of Chinese poetry as well. What really distinguishes this one is that all five of the translators are accomplished American poets in their own right. Here we find the eccentric, wildly inaccurate and yet sometimes intuitively ingenious renderings by Ezra Pound, the tersely colloquial if likewise linguistically careless versions by William Carlos Williams, the sensitive and quietly subtle though pretty much reliable verses by Kenneth Rexroth, the deeply spiritual explorations of nature with a counter-cultural edge by Gary Snyder, and finally the translations of David Hinton which alchemically combine poetic sensibility and academic acumen in a proper balance. All in one anthology. Much more than a mere continuum of accuracy (from less to more) is to be found here,

though.

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