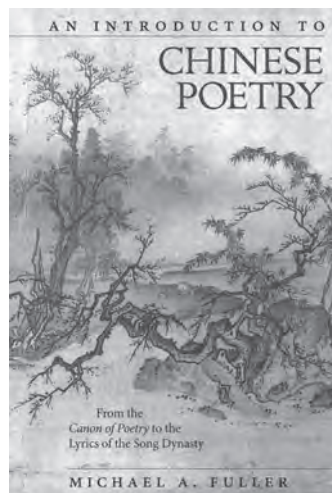


An Introduction to Chinese Poetry

From the Canon of Poetry to the Lyrics of the Song Dynasty

HARVARD EAST ASIAN MONOGRAPHS (BOOK 408)
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Reviewed by Ihor Pidhainy



Michael Fuller's *An Introduction to Chinese Poetry: From the Canon of Poetry to the Lyrics of the Song Dynasty* is a complete joy to read. Winner of the Franklin R. Buchanan Prize for Curricular Materials, Fuller's volume has achieved recognition as a pedagogical work. I highly concur in the assessment of the work and will elucidate what I see as some of its strengths, both as to what it contains and how it can be used in the classroom.¹

To begin with, its title is descriptive but incomplete. It does cover the history of Chinese poetry from its origins in the Zhou to its developments by the end of the Song dynasty in the early fourteenth century. It covers the major forms and styles of poetry, and examines a slew of famous poets and poems, many of which are integral to the Chinese canon. Moreover, it is an introduction for many students (as the author acknowledges) to the study of poetry in general in any language.

The author shares standard tools of analysis and directs students in ways in which they must work with the poetry to try to figure out meaning and significance. The author contextualizes this work, providing rich political and cultural tapestries within which the poetry was composed; presenting biographies of key poets; and introducing canonical writings on poetry and aesthetics, ranging from the "Great Preface" to Cao Pi's "Discourse on Poetry."

Fuller establishes a procedure by which to read Chinese poetry. He starts with the background of the time period and the author's life. He follows with the original text on the left and a literal translation on the right. He includes definitions beneath the characters and indicates the original rhyme beside the last word (in ancient or middle Chinese).² For many of the poems, Fuller includes one to two translations, often choosing to pair translations by poets (such as Ezra Pound and Gary Snyder) with those of scholars (such as Stephen Owen and Burton Watson).³ Fuller concludes with notes and questions for the student, which are key in directing students in how to read Chinese poetry. These notes occasionally cross-reference earlier poems or features in the tradition.

The book consists of an introduction, ten chapters, two appendices, and recommended readings. Each of these is meaningful and is used to good purpose. Fuller starts with an author's note on how to use this book, followed by a chronology and a list of terms. He then launches into the ten chapters, which I discuss under four subsections, that guide the organization and approaches taken by scholars in regard to reading the poems

Section 1: Chapters 1–2: Language and Poetry

"Chapter 1: The Classical Chinese Language" looks at how Chinese language works, divided into three sections: the sound system, morphology, and syntax. Fuller explains where English and Chinese are similar and where they differ, and he provides many helpful examples in elucidating points of grammar.

"Chapter 2: The Formal and Rhetorical Features of Chinese Poetry" introduces students to basic aspects of poetry. Under structure, Fuller discusses line, tonal prosody, caesura, couplets, quatrains, and octaves. Under rhetoric, Fuller explains rhetorical tropes such as metaphor, simile, and allusion, and qualities of voice such as persona and implied author. In his discussion of persona, Fuller brings together the poetry of Meng Jiao, Robert Browning, and Don Marquis, highlighting how poetry can be read across cultures.

In "Interlude: On the Translation of Poetry," Fuller raises the question of what makes translation work and examines the range of translations available from the sensibility of a poet (uninformed of Chinese language) and as a scholar deeply read in the tradition. These tensions inform many of the paired translations that are found throughout the book.

Section 2: Chapters 3–5, Poetry from Zhou up to the Tang

"Chapter 3: Origins of the Poetic Tradition" examines the "Great Preface" to the Mao edition of *The Canon of Poetry*, *The Canon of Poetry (Shijing)*, and *The Songs of Chu (Chuci)*. Fuller's use of "In the Field There Is a Dead Deer" (Mao 23) shows off how he handles a text. In parallel columns, we have the Chinese original (with cribs beneath) on the left and Fuller's translation on the right. This is followed by Ezra Pound's poetic translation and Joseph R. Allen's more academically attuned translation. Fuller then turns to the commentarial tradition, excerpting from the Mao preface, Zheng Xuan (127–200), and Zhu Xi (1130–1200). Fuller's notes and questions follow. He asks about the poem as performance, the padding of the poem by Pound, and how one could read this poem as one of morality. One can imagine sitting in Fuller's classroom and listening to students unwinding the complexities of this simple song.

"Chapter 4: Poetry in the Han, Wei, and Jin Dynasties" covers the development of the pentasyllabic verse of the *shi* and the later *fu*, concluding with an excerpt from Cao Pi's "A Discourse on Literature." Fuller's introduction to the *fu* is a good example of how he engages students with this rather difficult form that falls between poetry and prose. Let us take Fuller's use of Xiang Xiu's (227–300) "Thinking of Former Times" as an example. The preface is included (without notes and only the literal translation) to set the stage. The poem follows again without outside translations. Fuller relies on his notes and questions to help students grasp what a *fu* is and how it functions.

"Chapter 5: The Maturing of Convention: The Poetry of the Northern and Southern Dynasties" covers the great nature poets Tao Qian, Xie Lingyun, and others. Fuller conveys this complex period thoroughly for a good three pages, more complete than encountered in textbooks on Chinese history. Fuller's reading of a pair of poems by Yu Xin (513–581), "Dusty Mirror" and "Again Parting from Secretarial Minister Zhou," shows how he gets students to read palace-style poetry while looking deeply at their contextual footprint. "Dusty Mirror" is a *yongwu* (chanting about objects) poem, while "Again Parting" belongs to the border poetry genre. Both are given within the context of time and perspective, highlighting the open-ended nature of Fuller's use of discourse in the classroom. Fuller concludes with Wang Xizhi's "Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Collection," bringing in a discussion of elite culture, intellectual Daoism, and calligraphy.

Section 3: Chapters 6–8: The Tang Dynasty and Du Fu

"Chapter 6: Early and High Tang Poetry before Du Fu" starts with court poetry and ends with Meng Haoran, Wang Wei, and Li Bai. Fuller uses these poems to expand the range of student discourse about China. In reading Wang Zhihuan's (688–742) "Climbing Stork Tower," Fuller notes that "[c]ontemporary students in China learn this poem as a call for them to study yet harder. [He then asks the students to] investigate this interpretation" (189). This open-ended direction points to the cultural relevance of this poem in contemporary China—and in a modern classroom as well. In another example, Fuller shows how Li Bai uses the Xi Shi story (a beauty sent to seduce and discombobulate the king of a neighboring kingdom) in "Song of Roosting Crows." He encourages students to compare Li's take

with that of Xiao Gang's (503–551) earlier version, thus linking a culturally relevant story with a changed importance across time.

"Chapter 7: Du Fu," containing nineteen of the master's poems, is the richest chapter in the book. The intensity of this chapter results from the complexity of the verse—Du Fu's magical workings in Chinese are subtle and allow for all sorts of difficulties. Fuller describes Du Fu's life and poetry in a thorough four-page introduction. Fuller highlights the multiplicity of understandings that Du Fu generates. For example, "A Spring Vista" pits translations of Fuller, Gary Snyder, and Stephen Owen. Fuller notes that "[t]his is perhaps Du Fu's most famous poem, but it is not clear what it means exactly. It seems to invite sentimental reading that overlooks the complexities that make the poem so famous" (235). Each of Fuller's questions leads the student deeper into the complexities of this poem. In "Moonlit Night," Fuller confronts the question of what makes good translation. He uses David Hinton's translation as a contrast to his own literal reading. Where Fuller seeks accuracy, Hinton stresses poetic success. Fuller notes that Hinton's use of lines and line breaks gives his translation an "Americanized" sense to it, but he does not dismiss it. Instead, he has students engage with it by "rewrit[ing] the last sentence of Hinton's translation in plain English" (237), underlining the difficulties of making translation readable and enjoyable.

"Chapter 8: Middle and Late Tang Poetry" is a study of how poets of this period responded to the unbearable influence of Li Bai and Du Fu. Fuller begins with Bai Juyi and includes "Ballad of the Pipa," preface and all, to make a case for the richness of this period, explaining to students the difficulties of understanding this poem outside of a Chinese cultural context.

Han Yu's "Teasing Zhang Ji," already referenced in chapter 2 on language usage, states boldly, "Li Bai's and Du Fu's writings remain: A gleaming blaze ten thousand feet long" (295). Fuller instructs students to compare features of this poem with earlier poems by Du Fu and Li Bai. Late Tang poets are contrasted with their strange aura, but still, Li He's "Song of Changping Arrowhead" is connected to earlier songs by Li Bai and Cao Cao (155–220), which stresses how deeply the writers were immersed in earlier models and poems.

Section 4: Chapters 9–10: Ci Poetry

In "Chapter 9: The Growth of a New Poetic Form: The Song Lyric," Fuller describes the development of the *ci* from the Tang through the Five Dynasties to the Song. This is a poetry whose roots are in an oral tradition where the melody dictated what type of words were used and where they went. As time passed and the melodies were lost, the patterns for the words were retained, and poets continued to use them through the Imperial period. Various poems are drawn from, with the works by Liu Yong and Su Shi given most attention. With Su Shi's "Cherishing the Past at Red Cliff," Fuller directs students to examine how this *ci* poem works and what differentiates it with the earlier *shi* poetry that the students had studied.

"Chapter 10: The Song Lyric in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century" concludes with an examination of six important composers of *ci* poetry in the Southern Song. Among them, Li Qingzhao is perhaps the most prominent. She is also considered the first major female poet in the tradition. Fuller, who addresses male literati's use of the female voice in earlier poems, asks students to examine aspects of gender and female representation in Li's poems. In two lyrics of "To the Tune 'Like a Dream,'" Fuller asks his students about whether the persona in the poem of the first lyric is male or female and admonishes them to consider that "the gender is not given in the *ci* itself" (414). For the second lyric of this poem, he has them consider what constitutes cues of gender and what ways these can be challenged in a reading.

Fuller concludes briefly. Appendices of titles and variant characters follow, with suggested readings finishing off the volume.

How should this book be used? It is a thick book (450-plus large pages) in midprice range, so care should be taken with this. First and foremost, it can be used in Chinese literature and language courses, particularly at the

survey or even upper-level undergraduate courses. It is also ideally suited for a Chinese literature in translation course. In addition, it can be judiciously used in a Chinese civilization/history class. In particular, I like the author's introductions—they go into enough depth to get a grasp of the times involved. Finally, I think that this work is a wonderful resource for your own personal library. For though it introduces rules of grammar and prosody, it never boggles the mind; although it is built with a rich vocabulary, it does not deaden the senses. Rather, it enriches the readers and leads them into the old joy of discovery through language. ■

NOTES


1. Fuller has previously published *An Introduction to Literary Chinese*, which might prove a good companion to the volume reviewed here.
2. Fuller's format is reminiscent of David Hawkes's *A Little Primer of Tu Fu*, whose influence is felt throughout the work. It is also indebted to Zong-Qi Cai's *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology*, which Fuller acknowledges in his author's note. However, Fuller also notes how his book differs with an emphasis on student work, as contrasted with Cai's emphasis on the scholars who provide translations and guide students on how to read Chinese poetry (ix).
3. Fuller's appreciation of both scholars is immense. Stephen Owen's translations are used an astounding thirty-two times in the volume, and his work on the Tang has strongly impacted the author's approach to Chinese poetry.

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Key Issues in Asian Studies

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Ihor Pidhainy



In this brief yet thorough introduction to the key features and important names of Chinese literature, the author covers Chinese writings from oracle bones to the internet. Contextualizing the literature within political, historical and cultural frames, the author also provides a smorgasbord of examples from the authors noted. The book combines an introduction to the key features of Chinese literature, the names of outstanding writers and movements, and some interesting anecdotes that will leave students amused and curious for more.

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