

BOOK REVIEWS

Po Chü-i *Selected Poems*

BURTON WATSON, TRANSLATOR

NEW YORK: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2000

172 PAGES, PAPERBACK, ISBN 0-231-11839-2

This anthology of 128 poems and a short prose piece by Po Chü-i offers valuable insight into the work and ideas of the T'ang bard. To date, more than 2,800 poems have been attributed to Po, leaving translators with a substantial selection from which to present a choice personal image of the man. Watson selected a range of themes, from religious issues such as Buddhism and Taoism to less devout depictions of drinking and joviality alongside verse on melancholy. In his early years of literary activity, Po thought of poetry as a means to vent criticism of social and political problems. Later he preferred to recount everyday activities. Accordingly, Burton Watson writes that he puts special emphasis on such "poems of everyday life, which portray a man of quiet contentment" (x). As well as making reference to Po's celebrated simplicity of language, especially in comparison to Tu Fu or Li Po, Watson writes of his "abiding desire to portray himself . . . as a connoisseur of everyday delights, a man confronting the world, particularly in the years of old age, with an air of humour and philosophical acceptance." (ix)

Both Po's simplicity and his daily life have been gracefully conveyed into English. The original low-key atmosphere of introspective modesty composed with *joie de vivre* and a sense of self-irony veritably comes to life in Watson's rendition. As Watson is undoubtedly an expert on both Po's work and Chinese literature in general, with numerous translations published to great acclaim, there is no doubting the calibre of this compilation.

The only point of contention with the book could be that Watson failed to include Po's most well-known narrative poem, "Song of Everlasting Sorrow," citing the existing wealth of English translations. We can only regret this decision as the *Ch'ang-hên kō* had an inestimable influence on Japanese literature,¹ and Watson's forte lies in his studies of Chinese literature in Japanese.²

Watson's insight into Po's life and his clear presentation of the poet's thoughts and visions, with chronologically arranged well-annotated translations of the poems fully enhanced by his reader-friendly style, assures this volume a place amongst the treasures of undergraduate and secondary school teaching materials. ■

NOTES

1. See Masako Nakagawa, "The Consort and the Warrior: Yōkihi Monogatari," *Monumenta Nipponica* 45 (Spring 1990) 1: 1–26.
2. See Burton Watson, trans., *Japanese Literature in Chinese: Poetry and Prose in Chinese by Japanese Writers (Translations from the Oriental Classics)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975).

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Daoism and Chinese Culture

BY LIVIA KOHN

CAMBRIDGE: THREE PINES PRESS, 2001

218 PAGES, PAPERBACK, ISBN 1-931483-00-0

Livia Kohn presents us with a textbook meant for classroom use. In colloquial and non-technical language, clearly based on lecture notes, Livia Kohn's classroom text, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*, attempts to synthesize in simple terms the very complex social reality of Daoism. Finding coherence in the almost innumerable practices, ritual techniques, and lineages, Kohn defines the unifying principle of Daoism as "aligning oneself with Dao, creating harmony and a sense of participation in it . . . create a state of overall goodness and well-being—in cosmos, nature, society, and the human body" (4). Kohn categorizes the practitioners of Daoism into three types: literati, communal, and self-cultivating. Such categorization is problematic, and many scholars of Daoism will prefer more restrictive definitions. For example, Kohn discusses the Falun Gong movement in the context of modern self-cultivation groups. But the Falun Gong movement does not describe itself as Daoist, nor would any ordained Daoist priest consider it to be Daoist.

The eleven short chapters trace the history of Daoism from its ancient roots to contemporary practices, concluding with the recent adoption of Daoism into American religious and popular culture. Within this chronological framework, Kohn traces several themes, including basic philosophical notions, communal practices, the interaction of Daoism and the state, and Buddhist impact. Particularly interesting are Kohn's brief discussions of theoretical and comparative notions, such as millenarianism, monasticism, rituals, and meditation.

Kohn's presentation is sometimes hasty. For instance, the Shangqing revelations were presented to Xu Mi and his son Xu Hui, and not to Xu Mai, who, as Kohn herself notes, went into reclusion before the appearance of the revelations (88). Readers should further explore such problematic points using the brief bibliographies at the end of each chapter. This will be especially important for instructors, who may be unfamiliar with the field, in preparing lessons when using this book.

The quality of the book is marred by numerous errors in spelling and grammar, and other non-felicitous uses of language. Hopefully, these will be fixed in future editions. The index, complete with Chinese characters, is helpful in navigating through the book and for cross-referencing with other sources. This book may serve well as an introductory text to Daoism in high schools and introductory level surveys of Asian religions. ■

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