

BOOK REVIEWS

The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature

VICTOR MAIR, ED.
NEW YORK: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1995 (PAPER, 1996)
XXXVII + 1325 PAGES

This fine anthology by a first-rate scholar may soon become standard fare in courses in Chinese or Asian literature. Indeed, Mair states that the book is directed to teachers and students (xxxvi). There have been several comparable anthologies, most dominated by poetry. This wide-ranging work extends to many genres, and has thus been preceded only by Cyril Birch's aging two-volume *Anthology of Chinese Literature*. Teachers of Chinese literature and culture, particularly at the higher post-secondary level, may find this an excellent replacement for such works.

The 278 selections are divided into five broad categories. Part 1, "Foundations and Interpretations" (145 pages) oddly juxtaposes readings from (1) ancient inscriptions and divination texts; (2) texts of ancient thought, along with a few Buddhist texts (but no comparable texts of later Daoist or Neo-Confucian religious thought); and (3) works on literary theory and criticism. Part 2, "Verse" (357 pages) contains 165 items from many forms of Chinese poetry, including "Folk and Folklike Songs, Ballads, and Narrative Verse." Part 3, "Prose" (250 pages) is a catch-all for forty-nine items of nondramat-

ic nonfiction, such as biographies. Part 4, "Fiction" (340 pages) features twenty-eight short stories and extracts from novels and other texts of "fiction." Part 5, "Oral and Performing Arts" (230 pages) presents thirteen extracts from the genre in which Mair is most expert.

The clearly attributed translations, many previously published, are generally excellent productions by leading scholars. A few are by Mair himself. The only real shock is an extract from Confucius's *Analects* inexplicably drawn from the untrustworthy 1933 pseudo-translation by the dilettante Ezra Pound, who could not read Chinese.

Each entry is prefaced with an excellent introduction, which concisely yet thoroughly explains its nature and context. There are also abundant explanatory notes, which clarify obscure passages without unnecessary technicalities. Mair is correct that the "reader needs no prior knowledge of Chinese languages, script, or history to use this anthology" (xxvii). He appends a useful chronological table, and a romanization chart for converting Wade-Giles (his choice) and pinyin, but no index. There are no Chinese characters.

The chief issue is identifying the best pedagogical use for this text. Mair states: "This anthology can very well be used as the primary textbook for a one-semester general course on traditional Chinese literature or as an ancillary text for introductory courses on Chinese history, civilization, society, and culture" (xxviii). He is correct, though a Chinese-literature course would seem to require another text that provides historical introduction to themes and genres; this anthology would provide the illustrations. Mair adds that "many" of the selected texts were "chosen for their potential in stimulating classroom discussion" (xxvi). He mentions three entries for their thematic similarity to well-known Western materials, but does not explain how the other 275 entries could stimulate such discussion. He adds, "I have searched for pieces that are animated and esthetically pleasing, since these are often the most attractive and memo-



U.S.-China Teachers' Exchange Program

The American Council of Learned Societies is now seeking applications for an exchange program for teachers in American and Chinese schools (pending funding). This is an unusual opportunity for schools and districts wishing to begin or to strengthen Chinese language and culture programs and for teachers wishing to live and teach in China.

During the first three years of the project, we have had American teachers from across the country in "key" secondary schools throughout China—in Beijing, Dalian (Liaoning), Hohhot (Inner Mongolia), Luoyang (Henan), Suzhou, Changzhou, and Yangzhou (Jiangsu), and Chengdu (Sichuan). We anticipate that many of the same schools on the Chinese side will participate in the next year of the program.

The American teachers in China teach English as a second language. The Chinese teachers, all of whom teach English as a foreign language in China, will be prepared to teach Chinese history, language, and culture and/or English as a second language at participating American schools. ACLS sponsors orientation programs for participating teachers in the U.S. and China during the summer before the exchange year.

ACLS pays the salary of visiting Chinese teachers and the transportation of American teachers. Participating American schools continue the salary and benefits of American teachers during their exchange year.

For more information and an application package, please send a letter to the Education Office—China Program, American Council of Learned Societies, 228 East 45th St., New York, NY 10017.

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rable for undergraduates" (xxvii). But of course, the selections are shaped to some extent by Mair's personal sense of what is "esthetically pleasing," and different choices could have been made. One wonders, for instance, what makes the selection from the ancient text Mozi (usually considered ponderous and graceless) more "pleasing" than, say, the extensive poetic revelations of Shangqing Taoism, renowned for their transcendental grace.

Another problem is that teachers may need to scour the introductions to scores of entries to identify texts that illustrate themes or issues that the teacher may wish to emphasize. Nonspecialists may well feel overwhelmed by the 165 poems, or by the scores of other entries that will be unfamiliar to most users. In an ideal world, editors of such texts today might provide a teacher's guide, perhaps on an Internet website where a teacher could find an annotated list of entries on, say, women in Chinese life, or Buddhist themes in Chinese verse or fiction.

Many teachers of Chinese literature will find this anthology a congenial replacement for Birch's collection, with interesting new types of material from all periods. Nonspecialists may find its size and scope rather overwhelming, but with effort should be able to adapt it to most courses on Asian culture or literature. ■

Russell Kirkland

RUSSELL KIRKLAND received his doctorate in Chinese Language and Literature from Indiana University. He is currently Associate Professor of Religion at the University of Georgia.

San'ya Blues

Laboring Life in Tokyo

by Edward Fowler

ITHACA, NY: CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1996

262 PAGES INCLUDING GLOSSARY, SUGGESTED READINGS, AND INDEX

My first thought was that I could use this book in my upper division Japanese History course. However, selections from this book could be used in Asian Civilization and Culture surveys, sociology classes, or in high school courses. I recommend that teachers read this book for a more complete picture of Japanese society.

San'ya is a section of Tokyo which is home to the day labor market and most of the workers involved in it. With housing and jobs uncertain and with workers living on the fringes of society, San'ya offers a striking contrast to most of Japan. Fowler notes that San'ya is in the midst of Tokyo yet isolated from it. The heart of the book is the words of the day laborers, the people who deal with them, and Fowler's own experiences as a day laborer. The book includes a description of the area, including landmarks such as the Iroha Shopping Arcade, and a glossary of terms used in San'ya as aids to understanding the words of the laborers and Fowler's experiences.

It would be easy to focus on San'ya as a place of despair and poverty, or, as someone once said, as a study in what happens to the unemployed in a land of full employment. That would be missing the point. San'ya is people, a lesson Fowler painfully learned through a punch in the face (pp. 2–3).

Course reading assignments might best focus on sections two, "Lives," and five, "Work." The "Lives" section contains monologues from workers who are frustrated and beaten down; however, it also contains vignettes from men who are optimistic and proclaim that San'ya provides a chance for those who will work (pp. 56–57, 61, and 65–66). There are skilled laborers who live fairly well. To look just at the frustration and despair would make us like Fowler's acquaintances who came to San'ya and, after a brief look around, went home content that they understood the area.

Fowler's own experience as a day laborer is also a good area for discussion. Fowler finds jobs and loses them (in several cases because he is a foreigner). The reader sees the frustration of not being able to find jobs, but also Fowler's optimism that perhaps this connection or that labor boss might hire him. Fowler also begins to see San'ya as an escape from his "real life." We glimpse the real-life frustrations: the Fowlers are in the midst of moving from North Carolina to California; a sale of the North Carolina house falls through; he should be spending more time with his family. In San'ya his life is simpler. His possessions are few, and he has enough to pay his rent, eat, and buy drinks.

Anyone who has lived in Japan has seen groupism and its demands for harmony. San'ya is different. These men can be somewhat independent. They can set their own agendas; for example, the day laborer can decide not to seek work that day or, as Fowler did, he can work in Ōsaka or somewhere else. It is easy to see San'ya as the bottom of society, and Fowler does include information on the aging of the San'ya population and the decline in jobs. But for teachers the strength of this book is that it will catch students' attention. There are enough instances of optimistic, independent workers to force students to look beyond stereotypes and easy descriptions. One could ask whether these men do have a chance to improve their lives (the American/Japanese dream) or whether they are fooling themselves. (The suggested readings provide extra material to pursue this topic.) For research seminars, the book also provides other avenues for discussion, such as whether Fowler's method of reconstructing conversations without the aid of tape recorders or notes is valid, a topic he discusses in the last chapter. A class could discuss whether societies need an adjustable labor force. Or, one could have students look at the other end of the spectrum, the image of the Japanese businessman, by assigning several stories from Tamae Prindle's *Made in Japan and Other Japanese "Business Novels."* ■

David W. Blaylock

DAVID BLAYLOCK is an Assistant Professor of East Asian History at Eastern Kentucky University with a Ph.D. in Japanese History from Ohio State University. He spent a year on the JET program on the Noto Peninsula and two months in Tokyo doing dissertation research.