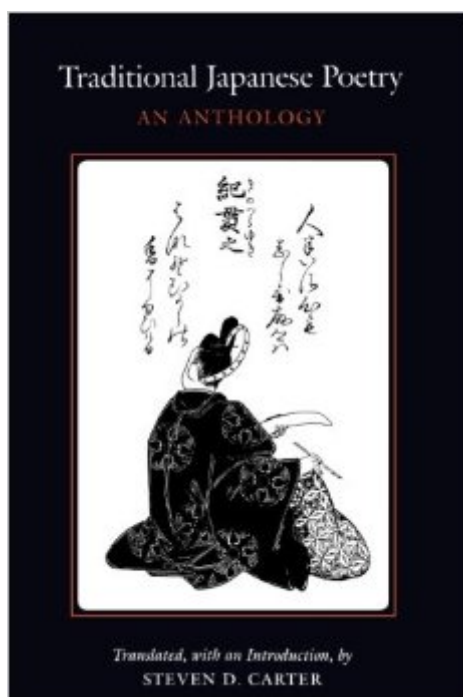


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Traditional Japanese Poetry: An Anthology



Synopsis

This anthology brings together in convenient form a rich selection of Japanese poetry in traditional genres dating back from the earliest times to the twentieth century. With more than 1,100 poems, it is the most varied and comprehensive selection of traditional Japanese poetry now available in English. Ezra Pound called poetry "the most concentrated form of verbal expression," and the great poets of Japan wrote poems as charged and compressed as poems can be. The Japanese language, with its few consonates and even fewer vowels, did not lend itself to expansive forms, making small seem better and perhaps more powerful. There is also the historical context in which Japanese poetry developed—the highly refined society of the early courts of Nara and Kyoto. In this setting, poetry came to be used as much for communication between lovers and friends as for artistic expression, and a tradition of cryptic statement evolved, with notes passed from sleeve to sleeve or conundrums exchanged furtively in the night. Add to this the high sense of decorum that dominated court society for centuries, and you have the conditions that led to the development of the classical uta (also referred to as tanka or waka), the thrity-one-syllable form that acts as the foundation for virtually all poetry written in Japanese between 850 and 1900. In choosing poems, the compiler has given priority to authors and works generally acknowledged as of great artistic and/or historical importance by Japanese scholars. For this reason, major poets such as Kakinomoto no Hitomaro, Izumi Shikibu, Saigyô, and Matsuo Bashô are particularly important collections such as Man'yôshû, Kokinshû, and Shin kokinshû. In addition, the volume also contains samplings from genres such as the poetic diary, linked verse, Chinese forms, and comic verse.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This anthology of traditional Japanese poetry, presents a grand collection of more than 1,100 poems assembled by Steven D. Carter, and translated by Carter and his colleague, Helen Craig McCullough. Carter traces Japan's poetic tradition from the poets of early courts, as recorded in the Kojiki (712 A.D.) and Man'yōshū (759 A.D.) through the beginnings of the Modern Age (early 1900's), in both transliterated Japanese (romaji) and English, headnotes with brief biography on each poet, and extensive footnotes and appendices on many aspects of the poetry. Carter, Professor of Japanese at the University of California, Irving, has provided us with a solid reference for exploring the great cross-section of one of the world's most fascinating subjects. I purchased my paperbound copy several years ago, and keep it at hand.

Stephen Carter is one of the better translators of Japanese poetry, and his anthology presents a good history of traditional Japanese poetry from the Manyōshū to modern era. Also appreciated are the Japanese versions of poems in the margin, albeit in romaji. For those who have no knowledge of Japanese, the translations and notes enable understanding, but having the original poems included provides those who know Japanese an opportunity to read them for themselves and compare them to the translation.

I have been a fan of Japanese poetry for years, and have sought a collection of uta (song or lyrical poem) at an affordable price. The relatively extinct form, chōka, is in my opinion, well represented in this compilation. My favorite form of uta/waka, the tanka, is extremely well represented. The hokku/haiku sections are not as definitive, but are also great. A chapter is included with senryū. The only items missing is original Japanese orthography, however the romaji that is included is (to a lesser extent) extremely useful. In my opinion this book is well worth considering.

This is a compilation of Japanese poetry from earliest times to the present. The poems are grouped by writer, with information given on the writer (when possible) and the circumstances giving rise to the poem (or shedding light on the poem). This was published by the Stanford University Press. The poems are presented in their entirety, and any notes or information are beside them, saving the reader from the annoyance of having to look to the bottom of the page or flip to the back. Beautifully done, well worth owning.

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