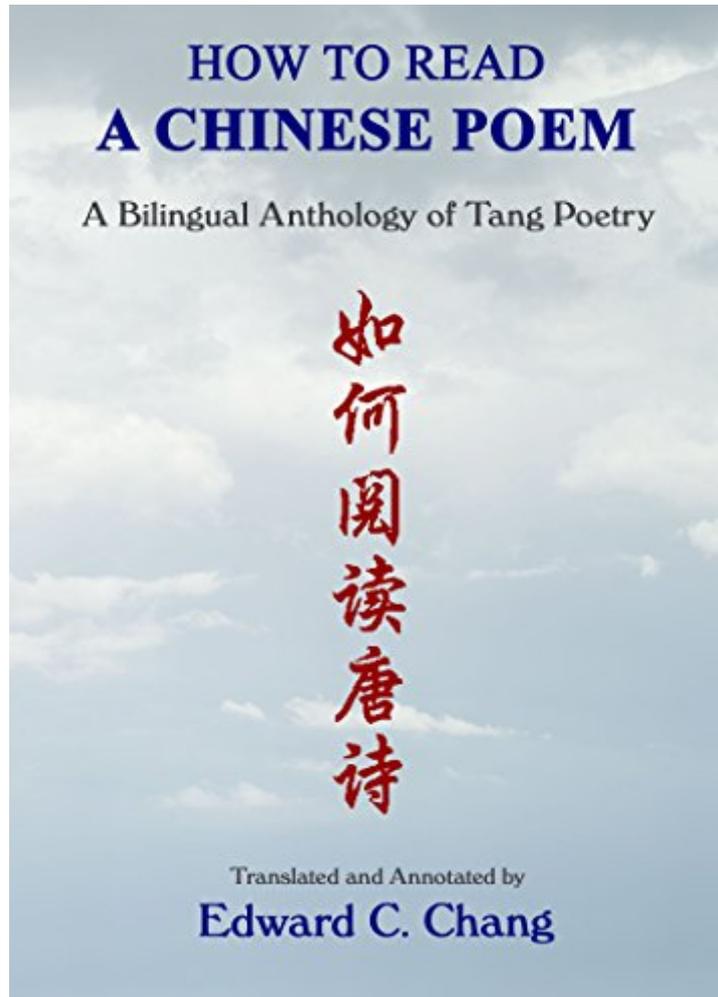


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How To Read A Chinese Poem: A Bilingual Anthology Of Tang Poetry



Synopsis

This bilingual edition of Tang poems offers a new approach to reading and understanding classical Chinese poetry. Included are nearly two hundred regulated verses written by the great poets of the Tang Dynasty, such as Du Fu, Li Bai, Wang Wei, Li Shangyin, and Meng Haoran. For each poem, both traditional and simplified Chinese characters are provided for cross reference. In addition to its literary translation, each poem is given a bilingual annotation with respect to the literal meanings of each key word or phrase. The tone and pinyin transliterations of each Chinese character are also provided. Readers who are familiar with the pinyin system can learn to recite the original poem the way the Chinese read it. This book is designed to help the readers understand Tang poems from a bilingual perspective. It may also be a helpful learning tool for students who want to learn Chinese through poetry.

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Customer Reviews

This really is a how to book, but a more complete title would be 'How to Read a Chinese Poems as the Chinese Read them.' Because with just a rudimentary understanding of romanized pinyin, a reader is able to experience the euphonious quality of Chinese verse from the Tang period(618-907). English translations starting in the last century have made these poems popular

with modern readers, because these 1,200 year old verses are more compatible with contemporary poetic sensibilities than European sagas and romances written at the same time and all western verse until the romantic movement. Despite the problems of conveying meaning from the tenseless ambivalence of Chinese to the regimented structure of English, some translations have carried much of the original thrust of the poems, minus nuances, across centuries and grammars and reshaped them into English poetry. But no translation can transport the lyric rhythms of the tonal patterns across the language barriers. This book sidesteps the barriers making Tang cadences accessible to many more. Having enjoyed Chinese poetry from translations, and wanting to find out about the original poems, but having a very limited knowledge of Chinese characters, I looked for books with literal word by word translations. 'Chinese Poetry' edited and translated by Wan-Lim Yip seems to give the most straightforward word for word transcription. Reading the actual loose ambiguous syntax of Tang poetry gives the poems a boundless feel. Its only shortcoming is there is no clues to the poem's intonations. This book rectifies that omission bypassing the language barrier giving us Tang music through a readable romanization and a concise and clear introduction explains the poetic rules of the time. Beware the rhythms are enticing and might lead to an addictive urge to learn Chinese.

This is the first most comprehensive bilingual book of Chinese poetry. It is designed for those who are interested in the Chinese culture and want to read and understand classical Chinese poetry. After reading the book, even a reader who does not know the Chinese language can recite the Tang poems written by famous poets in the 7th Century. The word -for- word and literary translation also elegantly express the poet's inner thought. Members of the Washington Chinese Poetry Society and I strongly recommend this book to the readers.

For one thing this book is slightly mislabelled. It's a crib and a translation of the famous anthology _ 300 Tang Poems _ / _ Tang Shi San Bai Shou _. It gives the pronunciation in modern Mandarin of every single character in every single poem so that even those who don't know any Chinese, or like me know only a few characters, can appreciate the sound of the poems. No one else has ever done this and the editor is certainly to be praised and thanked for doing such a superb job. I truly hate to be ungracious but the editor chose to follow the traditional order of the anthology, by genre rather than by poet. So if you want to read all the poems of Tu Fu or Li Bo or Wang Wei you have to hunt for them. I think a much better order would have been by poet. Further, the notes about the poet are quite meagre, totally unlike Kenneth Rexroth's masterful essays in his translations.

I've been studying Chinese for the last two years. I've gone to China for the last two summers. Now that I'm feeling decently comfortable with Mandarin, I've been diving into Classical Chinese. This anthology has been an amazing tool: both the simplified and traditional characters are listed; the complete pinyin is listed; the literal translations are underneath the characters so we can see what artistic license the translator, Edward Chang, takes; it contains useful annotations for the more erudite historical and cultural allusions; and it has markings showing how the rhythm constricts itself to the restrictions of the poetic form. Not only have I been able to name-drop the big Tang poets -- Li Bai, Wang Wei, Du Mu, Du Fu -- but I can quote verse from memory. This has, exceedingly so, been its greatest value. I can relish the sounds of the poem. As the introduction points out, Chinese poetry, like essentially all poetry, is meant to be read aloud, in many cases even chanted. With even just a cursory knowledge of pinyin and the Chinese tonal system, one can recite and hear the words spoken by sagacious court-scholars 1300 years ago. Translating Chinese is difficult. Translating Classical basically involves writing poetry with a loose template. More avant garde translators attempt to "modernize" the content through familiar structures and diction, but Chang stays faithful and accurate to the form. For certain poems, some translators handle certain problems (such as the brevity or ambiguity of part-of-speech) better than Chang, but not many. Chang's translations here are some of the most consistently solid renditions I've seen. And if you're displeased by the result, you can attempt to construct your own version with the literal translations found under the characters. Overall, this is a must-have for anyone interested either in Chinese poetry or the Chinese language.

"How to Read a Chinese Poem" is a very good book that could have been an excellent book. If the author had given an English gloss for each individual character, rather than for entire phrases, it would have been a help to those trying to learn to read Classical Chinese, as well as giving a better idea of the structure of the poem from a semantic point of view. The author talks about parallelism, but one cannot see that parallelism if the meanings of the individual characters are not known to the reader. It's still a book worth having for those who want to know more about Chinese poetry, but it could have been so much better.

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