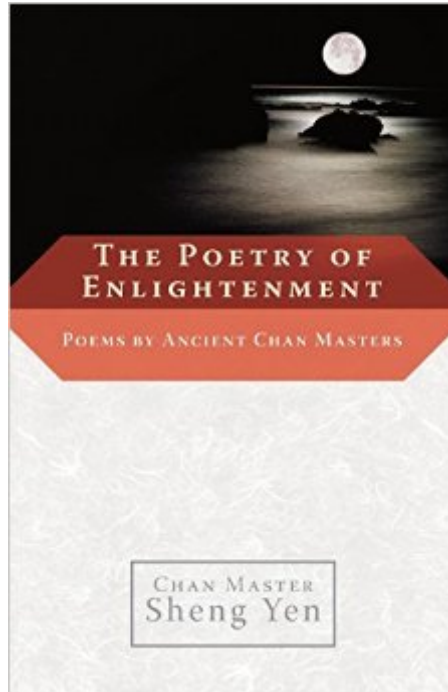


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The Poetry Of Enlightenment: Poems By Ancient Chan Masters



Synopsis

For the masters of the Chan tradition, poetry was a form of creative expression, but even more than that, it was a primary vehicle for teaching. Here a modern master presents ten teaching poems from the ancient masters, with illuminating commentary. "These poems flow directly from the minds of the enlightened Chan masters," Master Sheng Yen says. "We get a glimpse into their experience at the time of, and after, their enlightenment. It is my hope that this collection of poems will give those who are interested in the practice a new way of looking at Chan."

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Customer Reviews

Many people will enjoy reading these Ch'an gathas (verses). However, in places, I felt certain misgivings about the commentary material. For instance, I wondered if the dismissive remarks (p. 45) about Yung-chia's "Jpn. Yoka Daishi) T'ien-tai (Jpn. Tendai) background were justified, as if the merits of the 'Cheng Tao Ke' or 'Song of Enlightenment' had to be seen wholly as the fruit of Yung-chia's Ch'an training. True, Yung-chia confessed that he had formerly devoted excessive attention to sutras and shastras etc. However, like a number of early Ch'an masters, Yung-Chia embraced a joint T'ien-tai/Ch'an practice. The T'ien-tai 'triple insight' and 'combined triple insight' (a Chinese adaption of samatha-vipsayana) refers to a dynamic practice, complementary to Ch'an. Hence, while Yung-chia certainly extolls Ch'an in his famous gatha, the 'Song of Enlightenment' could equally well be seen as a reflection of T'ien-tai based insight. Tao-yuan's

'Transmission of the Lamp' (Chuan Teng Lu) - technically a Ch'an school document, included several T'ien-tai masters. The picture here is not quite so black and white as we might suppose. The more 'formal' aspects of T'ien-t'ai are another matter. Again, I was puzzled by the remarks about the Ts'ao-tung school's 'wu-wei' or 'Five Ranks' (p. 74) suggesting that they 'all have the same basis in enlightenment.' What is that supposed to mean? Though the Ts'ao-tung teaching alludes to 'five ranks,' what it boils down to, in practice, is a 'three way interplay' between - the 'guest' position, the 'host' position - and the host-in-host.' These are distinct phases of insight, and it is only in the final stage - that the distinctions, hitherto coined in the teaching - dissolve away.

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