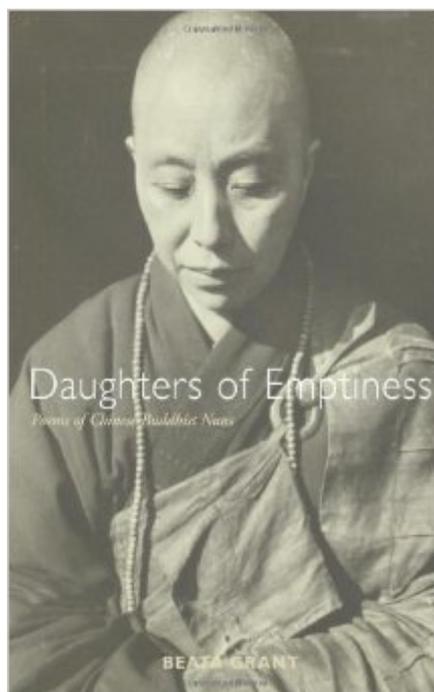


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Daughters Of Emptiness: Poems Of Chinese Buddhist Nuns



Synopsis

Women played major roles in the history of Buddhist China, but given the paucity of the remaining records, their voices have all but faded. In *Daughters of Emptiness*, Beata Grant renders a great service by recovering and translating the enchanting verse - by turns assertive, observant, devout - of forty-eight nuns from sixteen centuries of imperial China. This selection of poems, along with the brief biographical accounts that accompany them, affords readers a glimpse into the extraordinary diversity and sometimes startling richness of these women's lives. A sample poem for this stunning collection: The sequence of seasons naturally pushes forward, Suddenly I am startled by the ending of the year. Lifting my eyes I catch sight of the winter crows, Calling mournfully as if wanting to complain. The sunlight is cold rather than gentle, Spreading over the four corners like a cloud. A cold wind blows fitfully in from the north, Its sad whistling filling courtyards and houses. Head raised, I gaze in the direction of Spring, But Spring pays no attention to me at all. Time a galloping colt glimpsed through a crack, The tap [of Death] at the door has its predestined time. How should I not know, one who has left the world, And for whom floating clouds are already familiar? In the garden there grows a rosary-plum tree: Whose sworn friendship makes it possible to endure. - Chan Master Jingnuo

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Daughters of Emptiness" is a fascinating volume of Chinese Buddhist poetry, written by nuns over the centuries. It begins with the Six Dynasties, and ends with the Qing Dynasty, the era of The Last

Emperor. While the women may differ over the millennia, their poetry retains some basic themes on solitude, emptiness, and to a certain extent, self-centeredness. The introduction is helpful in providing context for the spiritual lives of Buddhist nuns. The poems in "Daughters of Emptiness" verge on haikus, since they are of Chan Buddhism. Chinese Chan Buddhism became what we now know as Zen when it migrated eastward to Japan and was the dominant form of spirituality for the warrior class/samurai. The opening poem is by Huixu, with her spare poem that goes "Worldly people who do not understand me/ Call me by my worldly name Old Zhou. You invite me to a seven-day religious feast, But the feast of meditation knows no end." During the second half of the Qing Dynasty, Yinhui of Jiangsu Province writes, "The activity-consciousness of over 40 years tossed away, as suddenly I raised the jeweled sword as if I were a hero. My shouts cause the 3000 buddhas to topple over, and the great universe to be contained in a single hair!" Kedu, who was at the Lianhua Convent in Zhejiang Province, chose the religious life after she saw her father's corpse. She wrote, "Drop off the body: the river of the world will never end, stately and grand: nothing to show but the inner master. When morning comes, change the water, light the incense, everything is in the ordinary affairs of the ordinary world."

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