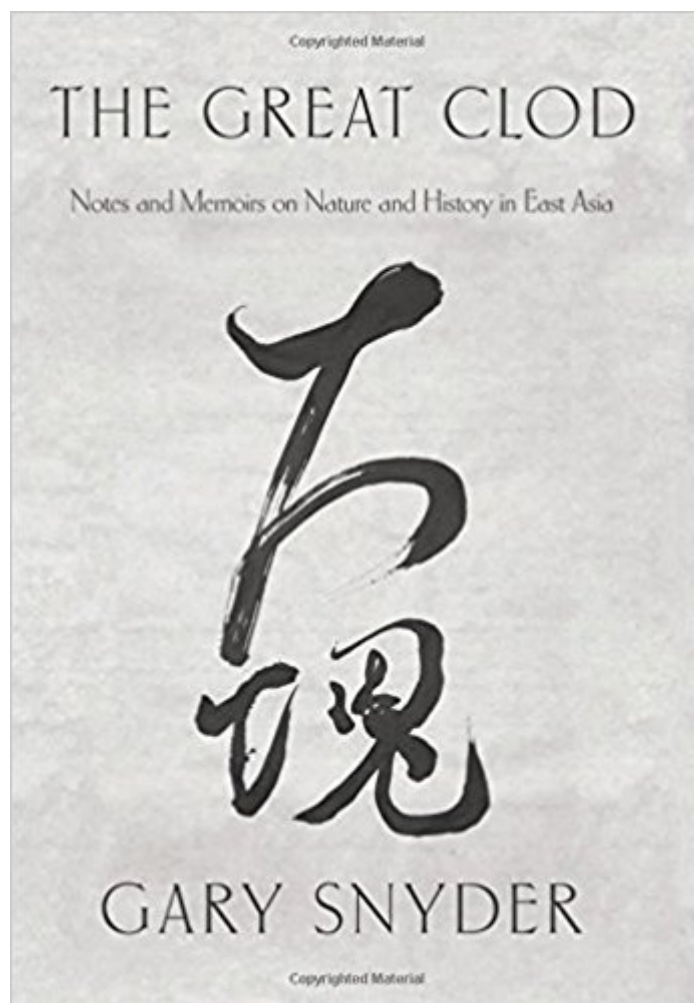


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The Great Clod: Notes And Memoirs On Nature And History In East Asia



Synopsis

For the full course of his remarkable career, Gary Snyder has continued his study of East Asian culture and philosophies. From the Ainu to the Mongols, from Hokkaido to Okinawa, from the landscapes of China to the backcountry of contemporary Japan, from the temples of Daitokoji to the Yellow River Valley, it is now clear how this work has influenced his poetry, his stance as an environmental and political activist, and his long practice of Zen. Growing up in the Pacific Northwest, Asia became a vocation for Snyder. While most American writers looked to the capitals of Europe for their inspiration, Snyder looked west to the East. *American letters* is profoundly indebted to this geographical choice. Long rumored to exist, *The Great Clod* collects several published in *The Coevolution Quarterly* almost forty years ago when Snyder briefly described this work as "The China Book," and several others, the majority, never before published in any form. "Summer in Hokkaido," "Wild in China," "Ink and Charcoal," "Wolf-Hair Brush," these essays turn from being memoirs of travel to prolonged considerations of art, culture, natural history and religion. It is filled with Snyder's remarkable insights and briskly beautiful descriptions.

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I first encountered Gary Snyder's writing in *Sierra Magazine* (Sept./Oct. 1989), where his essay *The Etiquette Of Freedom* appeared in advance of its publication in *The Practice of the Wild*. I loved the essay and book; they had a formative impact on my thinking and how I began to apprehend the

world. To me much of *The Great Clod* marks a return to the beauty and engagement of that earlier writing. I've followed almost everything Gary Snyder has produced in the intervening years, and this is some of his best, especially three consecutive chapters: *Summer In Hokkaido*; *All He Sees Is Blue: Basic Far East*; and *The Great Clod: China And Nature*. The sections on Hokkaido set forth lovely writing in sound and image. I felt transported, and had clear visions of the place. Previously unused (as far as I know), his comparison of Hokkaido to North America's Maine coast framed Japan's northernmost island in a way that was clear and literally lit up my mind. I read it late at night before going to sleep, and the images brought me wide awake. Much of what follows draws a good deal from the work of others, Edward H. Schafer and Mark Elvin, to name two, but Snyder has always been a master at accessing interesting information assembled by others to build something personal and unique with his reflections and ideas. I have always wished I could have taken a class with Gary Snyder, but his books are as close as I'll get, and they make for . This a superb addition to his body of work, valuable throughout and outstanding in several wonderful sections.

While some of this old, rest is new. Great on ecology. Gary Snyder fan

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