

CHINESE LITERATURE: AN INTRODUCTION

By Ihor Pidhainy

Chinese literature is a pleasure to teach and to read; it holds an importance and relevance both in historical terms and in understanding the world today. Yet, its history, language and culture are quite rich, and different from much of the Western tradition that the study of Chinese literature can prove challenging. When Lucien Ellington first discussed with me the idea of writing a short introduction to Chinese literature, I was immensely intrigued about how to meet this challenge and give both students and teachers a book that would be rewarding and a pleasure to teach and read.

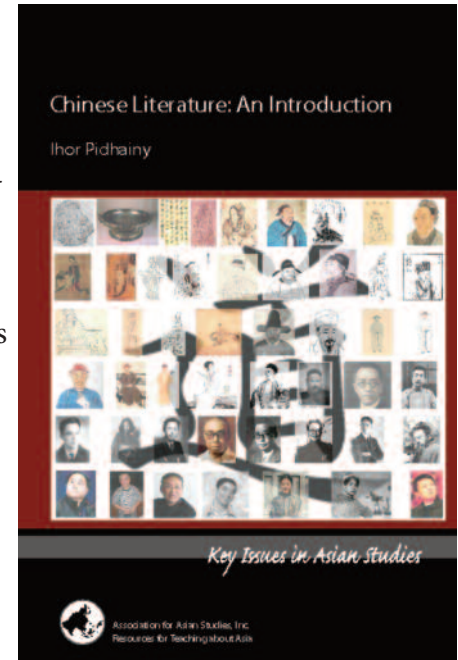
Chinese Literature: An Introduction is a chronologically-organized broad treatment ranging from the earliest writings up to the present. Starting with the oracle bones, we explore the literature of the early schools, examine the rich works of medieval and late imperial periods and finish with global China—writings that connect China closely with the world around it. On this journey, important genres, key writers and notable works are covered. Woven into this are sections on women's writing and literature from Taiwan, Hong Kong and abroad, and examination of the texts of the philosophical, historical and religious traditions.

In this book, a practical and handy set of author excerpts function as a mini-anthology. Easy to use to demonstrate points, these excerpts also can be incorporated into classroom discussion. In addition, the volume includes references to numerous anthologies, translations of novels and studies of literature—including websites—that undergraduates can use for further research.

Emphasis on historical context is also provided. Each chapter contains short summaries of political, social, economic and intellectual events for particular eras. For example, modern Chinese literature is anchored through discussions of the May 4th movement, the Chinese Civil War and policies implemented in the People's Republic of China. Further, comparative references to historical events or parallels made to other regions of the world, allow for cross-cultural comparisons, making this book user-friendly in history as well as literature courses.

Understanding cultural context is key to reading literature, and in this book brief introductions are given to features of Chinese culture. For example, the spoken tones and written characters of the Chinese language had an impact on how literary forms developed and how texts were written. The ideas and practices involved with Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism are essential in understanding Chinese literature. The technological developments in literary production are also important in understanding why changes occurred—from the oral to textual to printed to online production.

Finally, I wanted to make the book entertaining. Each chapter begins with a brief and, hopefully, arresting anecdote designed to hook the reader. The poems I included were chosen because they also read well and address themes such as love, death, and friendship that students appreciate and find interesting. I attempt to provide in this book a succinct introduction to the rich history of Chinese literature, presenting enough threads that teachers could take students in any number of directions in their study of China.



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