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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Idema, Wilt, and Loyd Haft. *A Guide to Chinese Literature*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1997. 473 p. ISBN: 0-89264-099-5

This guide began as a text book used in a survey course in Chinese literature at Leiden University in The Netherlands in the early 1980's. Later, Lloyd Haft later supplemented the contents and with Wilt Idema revised the entire text and published it as *Chinese letterkunde* in 1985. This Dutch version was later extensively revised, expanded, and translated into the present book.

According to the authors, *A Guide to Chinese Literature* is intended for the general reader as well as for students of Chinese culture. The first six of the book's twenty-eight chapters analyze the distinctive features which characterized the Chinese literary tradition from its outset until the early twentieth century. The remaining chapters are devoted to an overview of Chinese literature. The book is not an anthology, and it does not include excerpts in translation.

Idema and Haft divide Chinese literary history into six periods: pre-100 A. D.; 100-700; 700-1000; 1000-1450; 1450-1915; 1915-1990. Each genre is described separately within each period and subperiod. After a brief description of the formal features of the genre, its use, and its development within the given period, the authors mention the most important authors and their works. Because the authors try to cover more than three thousand years of Chinese literary works in one volume, their historical outline of Chinese literature is inevitably brief and oversimplified, and many important authors and works are excluded. Therefore, the usefulness of this book is much reduced for specialists and researchers of Chinese literature. Serious scholars may choose to use other excellent works on Chinese literature.

A Bibliography and a Glossary-Index are appended to the *Guide*. The Bibliography is arranged in the same sequence as the twenty-eight chapters in the main text, and is, in fact, much more useful than the main text. The Bibliography is arranged by subject in the chapter subdivisions and by date of publication within sections. It is limited to works in English, French, German, and Dutch. Except for English titles, the list is very selective and includes only the most important books, articles, and translations. The authors concentrate mainly on publications issued after 1945 and include earlier publications only if they are still considered standard or interesting. When a title is self-explanatory, no comment is given, but for others the authors give content and sometimes an evaluation of the work.

While the Bibliography would be greatly enhanced if it also included works in Chinese and Japanese, it will nonetheless be a valuable companion to other excellent subject bibliographies of Chinese literature. The page numbers given in the Glossary-Index refer only to the main text, not the Bibliography. The inclusion of an extensive index would make locating authors and their works in both the main text and the Bibliography much more convenient.

In all, this *Guide* is a valuable and useful aid to the general study of Chinese literature. We may hope that the authors will enlarge it to a multi-volume work in the future.

Wen-kai Kung