

Chinese Literature: A Very Short Introduction

By Sabina Knight

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Perhaps nowhere else has literature been as conscious a collective endeavor as in China, and China's survival over three thousand years may owe more to its literary traditions than to its political history. This *Very Short Introduction* tells the story of Chinese literature from antiquity to the present, focusing on the key role literary culture played in supporting social and political concerns. Embracing traditional Chinese understandings of literature as encompassing history and philosophy as well as poetry and poetics, storytelling, drama, and the novel, Sabina Knight discusses the philosophical foundations of literary culture as well as literature's power to address historical trauma and cultivate moral and sensual passions. From ancient historical records through the modernization and globalization of Chinese literature, Knight draws on lively examples to underscore the close relationship between ethics and aesthetics, as well as the diversity of Chinese thought. Knight also illuminates the role of elite patronage; the ways literature has served the interests of specific groups; and questions of canonization, language, nationalism, and cross-cultural understanding. The book includes Chinese characters for names, titles, and key terms.

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Chinese Literature: A Very Short Introduction By Sabina Knight Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #373279 in Books
- Brand: imusti
- Published on: 2012-02-03
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 4.30" h x .40" w x 6.70" l, .25 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 160 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"Very much to the point, starts in antiquity." --Tyler Cowen, *The New York Times Magazine* ("A Really Short Book Review" section)

"This short book is a marvel of economy, substance, and style."--Tyler Cowen, George Mason University (on his blog *Marginal Revolution*)

"To summarize almost 3,000 years of literature in just 120 pages is no doubt a very difficult task; nevertheless, Sabine Knight has done so brilliantly." -- Taciana Fisac, The China Journal

"Sabina Knight has managed to square the circle in presenting a lucid and engaging survey of the main trends, authors and works of three thousand years of Chinese literature up to the present, striking the right balance between concrete example and general analysis, in such a short compass." --Wilt L. Idema, Professor of Chinese Literature, Harvard University

"A marvelous little book. Consistently lively, engaging, and thought-provoking. Knight successfully balances brevity and accessibility on the one hand and real intellectual substance on the other. It's beautifully written and a genuine pleasure to read."
-- David L. Porter, University of Michigan and author of *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England*

"Like all the best books in this series, Knight's covers a great deal of ground in a lively and opinionated but deeply informed manner." -- Jeffrey Wasserstrom, author of *China in the 21st Century* (on the Asia Society Blog)

"This book is a great way for me to show non-China professional students the valuable contributions that Chinese culture has to offer to our understanding of how the world works in general." --Elanah Uretsky, The George Washington University, Global Health, Anthropology, and Elliott School of International Affairs

"It would be hard to find a more pithy or profound description of the soul of Chinese culture than this little jewel, which deserves repeated and thoughtful reading; it is as brilliant and beautiful as it is brief." --G. Wright Doyle, author of *China: Ancient Culture, Modern Society*

"As an introduction to Chinese literature, this little book has accomplished its big mission. The scope of coverage is impressive, and the skill with which Knight makes the mountain of material cohere is remarkable." --Li-hua Ying, *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*

"...Knight travels from Shang dynasty oracle bones to *Shanghai Baby* in just 120 pocket-sized pages; three millennia of written words in five brief chapters." --Kate Foster, *The China Quarterly*

"This is a delightful summary of the entire history of Chinese literature. It is a great place to start as it covers philosophy, poetry, drama, and modern fiction with sensitivity and intelligence." --Scott P. Phillips, *North Star Martial Arts blog*

About the Author

Sabina Knight is Associate Professor of Chinese and Comparative Literature at Smith College and the author of *The Heart of Time: Moral Agency in Twentieth-Century Chinese Fiction*.

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