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# Early Chinese Literature



## Synopsis

Watson's account of Chinese writing from the time of the Chou dynasty (1100--249 B.C.) to the Latter Han (25-220) is accompanied by a chronology, biographical information, and a selected list of translations.

## Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Columbia University Press; Revised ed. edition (April 15, 1962)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0231086717

ISBN-13: 978-0231086714

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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## Customer Reviews

EARLY CHINESE LITERATURE. By Burton Watson. 304 pp. New York : Columbia University Press, 1962. ISBN 0-231-08671-7 (pbk.) Burton Watson has always struck me as an eminently civilized scholar and as a fine translator. Unlike certain others, he wears his scholarship lightly, and doesn't overburden his books with extraneous matter. His many translations and studies of Chinese and Japanese Literature are of uniformly high quality, and are well worth owning as they are books one often returns to. In the present book he has given us an account of Chinese writing from the time of the Chou Dynasty (1100 B.C. to 249 B.C) to the middle of the Latter Han (A.D. 25 to A.D. 220). The important works of this period are described with many illustrative quotations. After a brief but typically excellent Introduction, three main sections follow : HISTORY; PHILOSOPHY; POETRY. Each section includes a selected list of translations, and the book is rounded out with a Chronology and a detailed Index. Of especial interest in the Introduction is Watson's discussion of Classical Chinese, where, after a few remarks on the nature of the language, he makes a point of telling us that "the reader should perhaps be reminded that when he reads these early Chinese works in translation, he is at many points reading not an incontrovertible rendering of the meaning of the

original, but only one of a variety of tentative interpretations" (p.12). This is a useful reminder for those laboring under the misapprehension that there can be such a thing as a 'definitive' translation from Classical Chinese. Watson covers a wide range of topics in his book.

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