



The Chinese Essay

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Though collections of Chinese fiction, poetry, and drama abound, there have been no English-language anthologies of Chinese essays on the market. Now, veteran sinologist David Pollard has selected and translated the best and most representative examples of Chinese prose writing from the third century to the contemporary period.

Succinctly tracing the history of the genre in China in his introduction, Pollard then wittily and informatively introduces each writer chosen. The selections themselves include Ye Shengtao's ruminations of making a boat trip to visit his ancestors' graves, Fan Bao on life in prison, Gui Yougang's reminiscence of his mother, Yuan Mei's essay on borrowing books, and more. These writings not only give us marvelous little sketches of everyday life, lifting the curtain to a past world, they reveal still more about the minds of the writers and how they saw the world they lived in.

Though the compositions span the past 1,800 years, the bulk of the selections are from the twentieth century and range from early masters of the form, such as Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren, to the major writers of the middle generation, such as Ye Chengtao, Zhu Ziqing, Feng Zikai, Liang Shiqiu, and Liang Yuchun, and conclude with living writers who publish in both Taiwan and the mainland.

Pollard's aim has been to translate examples that are both good in and of themselves and also contribute something to the essay form. The classical selections represent the native tradition that the modern essayists either imitated or reacted against. Taken together, these writings illuminate Chinese attitudes and reactions to the world they inhabit and provide a vast amount of information about the details of everyday life, social intercourse, and man's reaction to his environment.



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