

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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# Chinese Literature

Classical Literature and the New Culture Movement 古代文学与新文化运动

## *Highlights of Chinese Classical Literature*

The history of classical literature dates back several thousand years. Important early works include classics texts such as Analects of Confucius, The Book of Changes (the I Ching), and the Art of War. Poems in China originated very early in history. Work songs, prayers in religious ceremonies and songs of romantic love could all be both sung and recited. Ancient myths and legends, the earliest epics, were a great source of the literature of the country. Poems of the Tang Dynasty and Ci poetry of the Song Dynasty are the most colorful chapter of Chinese literature. Chinese prose before the Qin and Han Dynasties was mostly concerned with history and philosophy. Works describing the various schools of thought of the Pre-Qin Period, and related historical accounts have been generally of high quality.

### Questions

1. Who was Si Maqian? What are the criteria he made for the tradition of historical writings in China?
2. Who was Qu Yuan and what is his most important works?
3. Who were Li Bai (Li Po李白) and Du Fu? What are the similarities and differences in their lives and poems?

## *The Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese Literature*

It is impossible to talk about Chinese culture without references to works like the Romance of the Three Kingdoms, the Journey to the West 《西游记》, the Water Margin 《水浒传》 and the Dream of the Red Chamber 《红楼梦》. The stories of all these novels are well-known to all Chinese people, and widely adapted into operas, dramas, films and even computer games. Many Chinese proverbs are derived from these novels. To understand Chinese values in all its complexity, one can do no better than to read these novels.

### Questions

1. Red Cliff is a Chinese epic war film based on the Battle of Red Cliffs (208-209 AD). It was released from 2008 to 2009. Red Cliff is the most expensive Asian-financed film to date. The first part of the film grossed US\$124 million in Asia and broke the box office record previously held by Titanic in mainland China. Which novel is the film based on? Why did the producer invest such a big amount of money in the production of the film?
2. How you ever heard of the story of Monkey King? In which of the above-mentioned novel is the story told?
3. Which novel is the Chinese equivalent of Robin Hood and His Merry Men?
4. The Dream of the Red Chamber is regarded as an encyclopedia of Chinese feudal society. Why?

## *The New Culture Movement*

The New Culture Movement of the mid 1910s and 1920s sprang from the disillusionment with traditional Chinese culture following the failure of the Chinese Republic, founded in 1912 to address China's problems. Scholars like Chen Duxiu, Cai Yuanpei, Li Dazhao, Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, and Hu Shih, had classical educations but began to lead a revolt against Confucianism. They called for the creation of a new Chinese culture based on global and

western standards, especially democracy and science.

#### Questions

1. What is the May Fourth Movement? And how was it related to the New Culture Movement?
2. What did the younger followers of the New Culture Movement call for? And what impact did it make on the traditional and modern Chinese culture?

#### Reading

Dingmin Wu, *A Panoramic View of Chinese Culture*, Nanjing: Yilin Publishing House, 2010

Lang Ye & Zhu Liangzhi, *Insights into Chinese Culture*, Foreign Language Teaching and Research press, Beijing, 2008

Ebrey Patricia Buckley, *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*, 2nd Ed, 1993