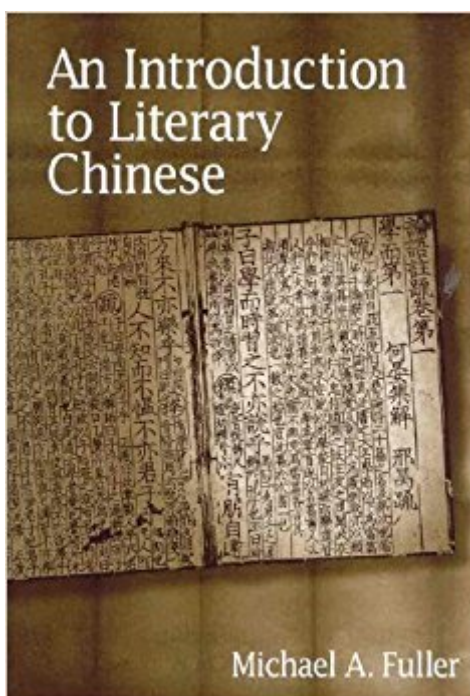


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An Introduction To Literary Chinese: Revised Edition (Harvard East Asian Monographs)



Synopsis

This textbook for beginning students contains 35 lessons of increasingly difficulty designed to introduce students to the basic patterns of Classical Chinese and to give them practice in reading a variety of texts. The lessons are structured to encourage students to move beyond reliance on the glossaries provided in the text and to become increasingly familiar with dictionaries and other reference works. The Introduction to the book summarizes the grammar of Literary Chinese. Part I presents eight lessons on parts of speech, verbs, negatives, and the basic sentence structures. Each lesson contains a grammatical overview, a short text with glossary and notes, and practice exercises. Part II consists of sixteen intermediate-level lessons based on increasingly long and complex texts. The advanced-level, Part III, focuses on selections from five important early Chinese authors. Part IV has six lessons based on Tang and Song dynasty prose and poetry. Appendixes provide further discussions of grammatical issues, chronologies and maps, and a glossary of function words.

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Customer Reviews

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Michael A. Fuller is Professor of East Asian Languages and Literatures at the University of

California, Irvine.

A very good book, but if you don't already read the Kanji, I recommend getting a dictionary for Literary Chinese. There are glossaries for each chapter's sample text, but they are not very detailed as to things like nuance and other meanings in context (which is a big deal in East Asian languages).

I really liked this book at first, and started to enjoy it less after getting about halfway through. The main reason is that it doesn't have translations for the passages with which to check your own reading. I ended up having to go onto the Chinese internet and Baidu'ing the passages in order to see what they meant in modern mandarin. Additionally, the notes section that helps talk about grammar is 1) insufficient, as it doesn't really explain all the necessary grammar points, and 2) disappears halfway through. By the midway point, you're essentially reading multipage passages of Zhuangzi without a translation to check against and without any grammar points to help you. This is not fun. The indexes are a bit confusing as well. But the notes, where they do exist, are good. The gradation of passage length is good at first, and then starts getting too big too quick. I'd give the first half of the book five stars, and overall three. If you had a teacher, this would be a different thing. This would be great with someone who could explain it to me, but without one, it's just alright.

This is a review of An Introduction to Literary Chinese by Michael A Fuller. "Literary Chinese" is not the same as modern or colloquial Chinese. Roughly speaking, literary Chinese (also called "Classical Chinese") is to modern Chinese as Latin is to Italian (or as Sanskrit is to Hindi). Literary Chinese was (according to most scholars) originally the written form of spoken Chinese, but it became a literary language used for writing and reading. Amazingly, it became the standard literary language for not only pre-modern China, but also for pre-modern Korea, Japan and Vietnam. (This is amazing because spoken Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese are actually not historically related to each other in the way that the European languages are related to each other.) Few English-speakers learn Classical Chinese, of course, so there are few English-language textbooks for it. Michael Fuller has produced a very nice one. This book assumes that the reader has some familiarity with Chinese characters (as by studying a year or two of modern Chinese or Japanese). This book will NOT teach you how to recognize the parts of a character (which is a crucial skill in memorizing them), or how to write them, or how to use a dictionary. So someone with no knowledge of Chinese will almost certainly find this book extremely intimidating. However, this is really good

book, I think, for students with some previous exposure to Chinese characters. Fuller's Introduction begins with a clear, sensible explanation of basic hermeneutic issues (e.g., why "Grammar Is Not Enough"). He then presents a learned but clear overview of grammar and phonology, with a bibliography for further reading. This is well done, but I think most students should skip it and dive right into the first lesson. The first eight lessons each introduce a major grammatical feature (e.g., "Nominal and Verbal Sentences," "Parts of Speech," etc.). The structure of these chapters is explanation, Chinese text (long form characters throughout), vocabulary list (including pronunciations using pinyin romanizations), grammar notes, and exercises. One of the things I like best about this book is that, right from the beginning, Fuller uses actual Classical Chinese texts. Lesson one uses two brief passages from the Analects of Confucius. I think it will be very exciting for students to be reading the "greats" of Chinese thought from the get-go. Beginning with Lesson 9 (p. 103), the notes become less extensive. However, the new vocabulary items are still identified, and discussion questions of the content, and grammatical "review questions" (e.g., "Is X used as a coverb here?") are added. Then starting with Lesson 25 (p. 175), readings include only new vocabulary items (although when an author appears for the first time in this section, Fuller supplies a general introduction to him, and brief suggestions for further reading). The reading selections close with "Selected Tang and Song Dynasty Writings" (p. 229ff.), which are only the Chinese text, with no vocabulary or notes. Before this last section, all the readings are ALMOST all from the Warring States Period (403-221 BC) or Han Dynasty (202 BC to AD 220). This is a good choice, since these periods are generally thought to have produced the paradigms of Classical Chinese style. If you are desperate to teach yourself Classical Chinese, and cannot begin with a good course in Modern Chinese, I would recommend buying this book with Reading and Writing Chinese by William McNaughton, which walks you through how to write many of the most common characters. (Even better is the Far East 3000 Chinese Character Dictionary published by The Far East Book Co., Ltd., but this is not available on , for some reason.)

Although this book is billed as a "textbook for beginning students," it would be more correct to describe it as a university textbook for beginning students of Literary (Classical) Chinese who already have at least a basic grasp of modern Chinese. Those who already know modern Chinese will find the book to be an excellent introduction to Classical Chinese. After an informative Introduction which covers the 'Problems of Reading and Understanding Chinese' and 'A Sketch of Literary Chinese,' the main body of the book follows in four parts: Part 1 - Texts to Introduce Basic Grammar; Part 2 - Intermediate Texts; Part 3 - Advanced Texts; Part 4 - Selected Tang and Song

Dynasty Writings. The book is rounded out with six useful appendices - including a comprehensive 40-page 'Glossary of Function Words' - and a detailed 35-page Index. Whereas each of the earlier lessons gives the Grammar needed for the lesson, the Texts, Vocabulary, Notes on the Texts, Questions, Exercises, and sometimes Bibliographic Exercises, these gradually fall away as the student's knowledge progresses, until in Part 4 only the bare texts of Mencius, Chuang Tzu, etc., are given. No answers are provided for the numerous exercises, and many of them require that the student either have or have access to a comprehensive Chinese-Chinese dictionary. Other exercises require that the student have access to a university library with an extensive Chinese collection. It might also be a good idea to provide yourself with a copy of Edwin G. Pulleyblank's 'Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar,' a book on which Fuller draws heavily. All in all this is an excellent textbook for students who already know modern Chinese, are studying with a competent teacher, and have access to a good library. Others who may be innocent of Chinese, but who have become intrigued by what is one of the most interesting and vigorous languages in the world, should look for a copy of Raymond Dawson's 'Introduction to Classical Chinese' (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) or the same writer's 'New Introduction to Classical Chinese' (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984). Unlike Fuller's textbook, neither of Dawson's require any previous background in Chinese at all - he even teaches you how to use a Chinese dictionary and how to write Chinese characters - and both can be used for self study. Parts 3 and 4 of the Fuller would be of interest, for their texts, to those who have already worked their way through Dawson.

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