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CHINESE LITERATURE

Outlines and Bibliographies

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I

THE CLASSICS

The Classics (*Ching*) make up the canon of the Confucian school. Like all collections of canonical writings, they are of an extremely heterogeneous nature, produced by no one writer and dating from diverse periods. They derive their canonical sanction from their traditional association with the sage Confucius, the connection in some cases being indirect, as of works attributed to his immediate descendants or disciples. The list of works acknowledged to be part of the Canon was not always the same, being established in its present form only during the twelfth century. However, during the Former Han dynasty, when the Confucian school was achieving its position of orthodoxy, six works were accepted as Classics of the first rank: The *Classic of Divination* (*I ching*), the *Classic of Documents* (*Shu ching*), the *Classic of Songs* (*Shih ching*), the *Spring and Autumn* [*Annals*] (*Ch'un-ch'iu*), the *Classic of Ritual* (*Li ching*), and the *Classic of Music* (*Yüeh ching*). Of these, the *Classic of Music* was a name only, and the *Classic of Ritual* a generic term for a number of handbooks dealing with ritual subjects, of which the books of rites which we know as *Li chi*, *I li*, *Chou li*, and *Ta-Tai li-chi* are later arrangements and interpretations. To these were later added, as less important but still orthodox parts of the Canon, the *Confucian Analects* (*Lun yü*), the *Mencius* (*Meng tzu*), the *Three Commentaries* (*Kung-yang chuan*, *Ku-liang chuan*, and *Tso chuan*) on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, and the lexical work *Erh ya*. Finally the Sung dynasty Neo-confucians singled out two chapters of the *Collection of Ritual* as especially susceptible to the kind of re-interpretation which they were trying to inflict on the Confucian doctrine, and with the success of the new school these chapters became parts of the canon as the *Great Learning* (*Ta hsüeh*) and the *Happy Mean* (*Chung yung*).

Because the Confucian Classics constituted the basic curriculum of the Chinese system of education and were literally memorized by every educated person through most of China's history from Han times on, they must be considered together as a corpus of works with unsurpassed influence on all of subsequent literature. In addition a few of the Classics possess intrinsic literary merit and are worth studying as literary works independently of their importance as influences. The *Classic of Songs* and the *Tso chuan*

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FOREWORD

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