

# The Essential Huainanzi

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Columbia University Presss widely anticipated, complete translation of the Huainanzi, published in 2010, opened exciting new pathways in the study of classical Chinese philosophy and literature. Compiled in the second century B.C.E., the Huainanzi is a critical work of early Chinese thought, clarifying a crucial period in the development of Chinese conceptions of the cosmos, human nature, and the social order. This abridgement contains essential selections from each of the Huainanzis twenty-one chapters and adds a new introduction and chapter descriptions. Designed for classroom use and general readers, it allows even greater access to this central work of Chinese intellectual history. Outlining all that a modern monarch needs to know in order to govern efficaciously, the Huainanzi emphasizes rigorous self-cultivation and mental discipline, attributing successful rule to a balance of broad knowledge, diligent application, and penetrating wisdom. The text represents a remarkable synthesis of Daoist classics, such as the Laozi and the Zhuangzi; works associated with the Confucian tradition, such as the Changes, the Odes, and the Documents; and a range of other foundational philosophical and literary texts, from the Mozi to the Hanfeizi. This abridgement preserves the Huainanzis special rhetorical features, such as its parallel prose and verse, and its unique compositional techniques, making its form and content accessible to students, specialists of later China, and audiences new to Chinese history and thought. For decades, Western scholars overlooked the Huainanzis sophisticated structure, creative content, and rich historical value, yet all that changed with the translation of the full text. The Essential Huainanzi continues to increase awareness of this brilliant work and change our understanding of early Chinese history.

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