

Reduced Reflections

Tan Kheng Yeang

Trafford (Apr 14, 2011)

Softcover \$15.86 (208pp)

978-1-4269-5420-7

Most collections of quotations are compilations of a variety of notable people's statements on diverse subjects. *Reduced Reflections* is entirely the work of Tan Kheng Yeang and is a delight to read.

Yeang arranges his topics in alphabetical order. Many of his dictums are reinterpretations of traditional proverbs but several are original. The oft-repeated architectural maxim that "form follows function" is reworked by Yeang and reads, "A building should be primarily for utility and secondarily for beauty." It is also often stated that "beggars can't be choosers," but Yeang expands the concept to, "A beggar does not indulge in repartee."

Yeang's philosophical viewpoints actually become evident through his musings. One of his more obvious opinions is his disdain for government. He does not specify any particular form of government—although dictatorships are thoroughly trounced—but the savvy political American reader will quickly identify with many of Yeang's observations. Concerning the debt crisis, Yeang summarizes the problem succinctly by noting that "A national debt is worse than a personal debt, for those who borrow are not those who pay." Yeang suggests how a society may have embroiled itself in such a mess. He remarks that "When an ignorant electorate supports an ignorant leadership, what result can be expected save disaster?" These are only a sample of the many perceptive maxims that represent Yeang's thoughts on the nature of government.

Unfortunately, Yeang's convoluted prose at times falls flat and fails to make the point. The maxim "It is ironical to hear a person not given to irony vent to an ironical remark" sounds pedantic. There are also several instances where the metaphorical connections Yeang attempts to make may not translate to all readers. In particular, proverbs that contain references to family members are stated simply ("Bait is the brother to deceit," "Zeal is the uncle of success") but lack the keen insight present throughout much of the book.

These shortcomings, however, hardly detract from the excellence of the book. Yeang's perspective on life is sagacious and often humorous. "The greater the envy, the greater the misery" and "A friendly letter is rarely too long and an official letter rarely too short" are two of his many enchanting insights into human existence.

Tan Kheng Yeang was raised in British Malaya and studied civil engineering at the University of Hong Kong. He is the author of twelve books that reflect his interests in a variety of subjects ranging from literature, philosophy, science, and poetry. Readers will thoroughly enjoy *Reduced Reflections* for its authenticity and honesty.

THOMAS H. BRENNAN (June 19, 2012)

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