

VI
Sixth Couplet

子不學 . 非所宜 : 幼不學 . 老何爲
tzu³ pu^{4.5} hioh^{2.5} . fei¹ shu³ yi²
yu⁴ pu^{4.5} hioh^{2.5} . lao³ ho² wei²

Rhyme: 支 chih¹ (平 tone) “a bamboo rod”, a synonym of its derivative (轉註), 支 p'u^{3.5} “the teacher’s cane” (the radical of 教 chiao^{1.4} “a teaching”), and a synonym also of 箇 ko⁴, the rhyme of couplet # V.

Translation:

*The ancestors do not bless a house where boys do not study;
when the young do not study, what becomes of the old?*
viz., retracing the hieroglyphic construction: “there is blessing, house blessing, no house blessing (of the house) of learning, of no learning, of the son’s not learning”.

> 所 “the house, dwelling place of a family”, *W.* 128A.

> 宜 “the blessing that emanates from the ancestor’s tablet” (cf. *KARLGRÉN*, # 21a, # 46a, and notes); however, according to *W.* 64F, it displays “a roof + the moon + the floor”, meaning: “to put the house in order at the day’s end”. Either way, the general meaning amounts to: “Provide in time for the comfort of old age!”, either of the boy’s own old age, or more probably that of his parents.

If preference is given to the latter interpretation (as it certainly should be), we may understand:

> 幼, not as a noun, “the young”, but verbally, “to give tender care to the young” (*Cd.*), as in *MENCIUS*, *HY.* 3/1A/7 (*L.*, p. 143; *C.*, p. 317), where Chu Hsi glosses 幼 with 畜 hsü^{4.5} “to rear, to instruct”.

> 學 allows the reading, hsiao⁴ “to teach” : “if you, parents, do not instruct your children carefully, what will become of you in your old age? ”

Notice 1:

The above mentioned *MENCIUS* logion may be unrelated to the present context. It is, however, too important not to be quoted in extenso. It reads:

老吾老以及人之老 . 幼吾幼以及人之幼 . 天下可
運於掌

“If [only] I were to treat the senior members of my own family with the reverence due to elders, I could succeed in getting the populace to treat its old people in a similar fashion. And were I to give the children of my own family the care fit for the young, I could succeed in getting the populace to treat its youngsters in a similar fashion: and all Under Heaven would then be made to go round in my palm.”

This logion defines the Confucian theory of government: the utopian “governing by example” dear to Enlightenment. Master Wang will come back to it in # 8-C, allusion.

Allusion:

幼不學 appears to allude to *MENCIUS*, *HY.* 7/1B/9 (*L.*, p. 168; *C.*, p. 342):

夫人幼而學之 . 壯而欲行之

From childhood on they studied it (viz. the art of governing themselves and others); and in mature years, they wish to practice it ...

The pericope discusses the training of mandarins and compares this training with “polishing jade”, a famous simile which will be quoted in the next couplet, # VII.

Etymologies: 幼 *W.* 90A; 老 *W.* 30E; 爲 *W.* 49H.

Notice 2:

The present, sixth, couplet appeals to the parents’ ambition, and to the boy’s sense of responsibility. Although material

wealth had many sources in imperial China, State officialdom was regarded as its only honourable source. A son who had studied, had passed the State examinations, and had become a mandarin, was able to provide his old parents with a material comfort not greater, perhaps, than if he had become a successful merchant (for instance); but he gave them an enormous social prestige.

Here the western sinologue feels confronted with the ambiguity of the word “honourable”: what deserves honour, and what actually receives it. Orthodox Confucianism presents its true adepts as having made a vow of poverty. See *Li chi*, 儒行: “A *ju* eats only once every other day, and there is but one jacket in the house, to be worn in turn by whomever must go out on the street.” &c. (C., II., p. 606 §10). Confucianist families of this type were rare, assuredly, but they did exist (cf. # 5₂-D, postscript); but even less puritan families felt it appropriate to make a display of poverty (cf. Sven Hedin’s account of his reception at the shabby home of the immensely wealthy Li Hung-chang). In practice, however, Confucianism was the ideology of a State that allowed its bureaucrats to help themselves to the wealth of the citizens. The officials were supposed to work hand in hand with, and to the advantage of, the established affluent gentry, and to enjoy its generous marks of gratitude. Filial piety, and loyalty to the interests of his own family provided to the State official at once the incentive and the excuse for any type of extortion. In stark contrast to the theory, there were in practice no moral restrictions, absolutely none, only administrative ones: “As long as you don’t get caught”, meaning, as long as the exactions did not result in popular rebellion. In China, family interests have absolute priority... up to the present day (cf. the *Li chi* logion quoted # 8-C). For obtaining an idea of the riches which servants of the State would accumulate in a very short time, see *Chin P’ing Mei*, *passim*, but specifically ch. 2, vol. 1, p. 81-82, and ch. 99, vol. 5, p. 524 (= *Index*, p. 304 and p. 214); or, for citing just one historical example, we may recall the aforementioned Li Hung-chang, the celebrated reformer. Starting from nothing,

he accumulated a fortune which easily compared with that of the imperial family (cf, *HEDIN*, vol. 2, p. 177).

Master Wang's Commentary

6-A

古語云

養子不教. 父之過

訓導不嚴. 師之惰

ku³ yü³ yün² : yang³ tzu³ pu^{4.5} chiao¹ . fu⁴ chih¹ kuo⁴
hsün⁴ tao^{3/4} pu^{4.5} yen² . shih¹ chih¹ to⁴

A venerable saying goes: “To breed children and not to educate them, is the father's blame; to instruct without strictness, is the teacher's negligence.”

Master Wang returns to Ssu-ma Kuang's “Song exhorting to study” quoted in the previous couplet, # V.

> 古 may mean “old, ancient” in the sense of “venerable”; it may also mean that Master Wang recognized this “saying” as an ancient word of wisdom quoted by Sse-ma Kuang.

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6-B

父教師嚴. 兩無外

學問無成. 子之罪

fu⁴ chiao⁴ shih¹ yen² . liang³ wu² wai⁴
hsioh^{2.5} wen⁴ wu² ch'eng² . tzu³ chih¹ tsui⁴

Granted the paternal education and the teacher's strictness, if the studies do not come to good end, it is the boy's crime.

Master Wang continues quoting Ssu-ma Kuang.

> 無外 “not rejected, not excluded”, a litotes meaning in fact “granted, given, being present”.

> 學問 “sitting over the books and asking the teacher for elucidations” (cf. *M.*, 3.7033.215), means, as a binome, “the

studies” (cf. *MTH.*, 2780.14). In this acceptance it occurs in *MENCIUS* twice: *HY.* 18/3A/2 (*C.*, p. 410; *L.*, p. 237) which does not apply, and below, Allusion.

> 罪 “the crime”, is a legal term, and Master Wang means it this way: cf. # 6-F, second quotation, a dreadful pericope in which the kanji occurs six times.

Allusion:

學問 most certainly alludes to *MENCIUS*, *HY.* 45/6A/11 (*C.*, 574-575; *L.*, p.414):

仁人心也義人路也。舍其路而弗由。
放其心而不知求。

哀哉。人有雞犬放則知求之。有放心而不知求。
學問之道無他。求其放心而已矣

*Benevolence is [the potency of *] the human heart; justice is the human way. Straying from (shih³) this way (viz. from justice), we go into the wrong (fu^{2.5}) direction; we lose (fang⁴) our soul (hsin¹) and cannot even wish (chih¹) to recover it.*

How sad! If someone has lost a chicken or a dog, he may wish to recover it; but when the soul is lost, it is impossible even to wish to recover it. The same holds true for the tao of studies (學問之道): it is as with the recovery of one's lost soul.

*) The commentary: 仁者心之德

Cf. the pertinent note in *L.*, p. 414 a-b: the aim of studies is to preserve, or to recover, the original goodness of nature (# 1₂-J). However, there are two more aspects to the matter:

a) Straying from benevolence (仁) and justice (義) makes a criminal (罪), hence the need for laws and punishments (cf. above, # 5₂-A, allusion).

b) Just as a man who has “lost his soul” (放其心) is unable even “to wish to recover it” (知求) – this is precisely what the *peccatum mortale*, the “deadly sin”, is all about (not to be confused with the seven “capital sins”!) – the ignorant (in our case, the child) is not conscious of his own ignorance, hence has no desire to acquire knowledge, hence the need for the

teacher's rod. On the contrary, the more we learn, the more keenly we feel our ignorance, the greater our desire to learn.

Note:

Ssu-ma Kuang's *Song*, quoted since # V₁ (cf. *M.*, 2.2486.24):

養子不教父之過 - 訓導不嚴師之惰
 父教師嚴兩無外 - 學問無成子之罪
 煖衣飽食居人倫 - 視我笑俛如土塊
 攀高不及下品流 - 稍遇賢才無與對
 。

勉後生力求誨 - 投明師莫自昧
 一朝雲路果然登 - 姓名亞等呼先輩
 室中若未結親姻 - 自有佳人求匹配
 勉旃汝等各早修 - 莫待老來徒自悔

Rhymes: 1-2 過 and 惰 rhyme 箇; 3-4, 6,8, 9-10, 12, 14, 16 rhyme by the ear -i⁴.

Translation of the remaining verses:

5-6) ... *Warmly dressed, abundant food, and harmony at home: / considering my mirth and prate [I feel dumb] like a clod of earth.*

7-8) *To climb for high, and not to succeed, means a-dropping into lower ranks; / a stroke of luck has little in common with the aptitude for becoming an Excellency.*

9-10) *Endeavour, young men, and seek instruction diligently; / attach yourself to an intelligent teacher, and do not stultify yourself!*

11-12) *And one fine morning the dream career will raise you up, / when, from a low rank, you will be called by name and surname into the front row.*

13-14) *Back home, if you are not yet tied to a loving bride, / a beautiful independent lady will seek you for a worthy match.**

15-16) *Endeavour, all and each of you, start early with your training! Do not wait for the old age to come. Self-pity is in vain.*

*) Quite often success at the State examinations occurred when the boy had become a mature man, and when the parents, who otherwise would have chosen his bride, had passed away.

6-C

又曰

勿謂 . 今日不學而有來日 - 今年不學而有來年

yu⁴ yüeh^{1.5}; wu^{4.5} wei⁴; chin¹ ji^{4.5} pu^{4.5} hsioh^{2.5}, erh² yu³ lai²
 ji^{4.5}; chin¹ nien² pu^{4.5} hsioh^{2.5}, erh² yu³ lai² nien²

Another saying goes: “Never say: ‘Today, no learning: tomorrow! This year, no learning: next year!’”

Here, Master Wang quotes the “Encouragement song” by Chu Hsi: *M.*, 2.2486.24, the last example given in that lemma. It is a short song, and Master Wang quotes it in its entirety (cf. its second part in # 6-D-E). Notice the impressive iambic rhythm and the simple style fit for children.

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6-D

日復一日 . 年復一年 . 嗚呼老矣 .

ji^{4.5} fu^{4.5} yi^{1.5} ji^{4.5}; nien² fu^{4.5} yi^{1.5} nien²; wu¹ hu¹ lao³ yi³

*Repeated one day, and also the next; repeated one year, and also the next: **Alas** for old age!”*

The average Chinese family felt it more rational to have the sons set to earning money: they could always study after retirement – more rational, more convenient, and infinitely more compassionate to both, the parents and the boys. But how contrary to Confucian ethics!

Internal quotation:

嗚呼 : Although this exclamation occurs several times in the Classics (*M.* 2.4084.10) the present context clearly refers us to the *Shu ching*, Book of Hsia, “The song of the five sons”: 五子之歌. The poem is supposedly a lesson (訓) left by Yü-the-Great for the guidance of his posterity:

五曰 . 嗚呼曷歸 . 予懷之悲 . 萬姓仇予.(...)

弗慎厥德 . 雖悔可追

*The fifth said: “**Alas!** Could I but revert (to my youth)! I feel bitterness in my heart; and everybody hates me. (...) I did not*

cultivate their (viz. my ancestors') potency. *Regrettable as it is, I can but retrospect.*" (cf. *L.*, p. 161, and notes p. 156.)

> 悔 cf. # 6-F quotation.

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6-E

是誰之愆

shih⁴ shei² chih¹ ch'ien¹

This is the fault of whom?

End of Chu Hsi's "Encouragement song".

Internal allusion:

愆 brings to mind the fifth stanza of Ode 255 (*L.*, p. 508):

Wen-wang said: "Shame, shame on you, Yin - Shang! It is not Heaven who leads you into drinking, and uses liquors to make you follow injustice as a model. You yourself maintain inveterate errors; you yourself do not distinguish between clarity and darkness; but amid clamour and shouting you turn the day into night."

Meaning: "Do not blame Heaven, for it is all your own fault".

Or as *CHUANG-TZU XXIII, HY. p. 62, l. 35 (Wilhelm, p. 175; cf. MTH., 1217.40)* puts it:

舍諸人而求諸己

To leave people alone (she⁴) and search [the reason of your shortcomings] within yourself.

Or *Li chi, She yi, HY. 46/11 (C., II, p. 679)*: the archer who misses the target has no one to blame but himself:

反求諸己而已矣

(For the great moral benefits derived from archery, cf. above, # 2-P, end.)

> 愆 商 Yin-Shang, a dynasty's name (B.C. 1766-1154), stands as an antonomasia for its last, degenerate ruler Chou⁴ 紂 "the Crupper" whom we have already met in # 2-E.

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6-F

言悔之無及也

yen² hui³ chih¹ wu² chi^{2.5} ye³*Meaning: Regrets come too late.*

> 言 introduces a paraphrase.

Quotations:

First quotation:

悔 refers us to the last line of the “Encouragement song” of Ssu-ma Kuang (# 6-B, Note); and to the aforequoted “Song of the fifth son” (# 6-D).

Second quotation:

無及也 is quoted from the *Li chi*, Wen wang shih tzu, *HY*. 8/10 (C., I, p. 485): The pericope is unusually dramatic. Here the extract of it: When a ruler’s agnate committed a crime (罪) that deserved either death by hanging, or branding, or mutilation (viz. the amputation of the nose, of the feet, or of the kneecaps – castration was not applicable to royalties), the judge announced the verdict to the ruler who, three times, implored clemency for his kinsman. At the third request, the judge no longer answered but exited precipitately and gave order for *the sentence to be carried out. The ruler sent a messenger after him: “Although it is a just sentence, we must graciate the guilty.” Whereupon the judge answered: “It is too late”* ... and the ruler to perform the proper mourning rites...

Meaning, that a boy who refuses to study, brings upon himself, and his family, disaster and shame not less than if he had been mutilated or hanged by a court judgement (cf. # 6-B). A humorous twinkle was detectable in the narration of Mother Meng’s pedagogy; not here.