

# IX  
Ninth Couplet

香九齡 . 能溫席 : 孝於親 . 所當執  
hsiang<sup>1</sup> chiu<sup>3</sup> ling<sup>2</sup> . neng<sup>2</sup> wen<sup>1</sup> hsi<sup>2.5</sup>  
hsiao<sup>4</sup> yü<sup>2</sup> ts'in<sup>1</sup> . so<sup>3</sup> tang<sup>1</sup> chih<sup>2.5</sup>

The couplet rhymes to the ear, in a vulgar fashion; also, it is held in *wen-yen* style, not in *ku-wen*.

Translation:

*Fragrant, at nine years, knew to warm the mat. Filial piety towards the parents is that at which it is fitting to attend.*

> 齡 *W.* 175 “year of age”. (For the different ways of determining the age in east and west, see # 2-L, end.)

> 席 *W.* 24M properly “a sitting mat”; used here for 枕席 chen<sup>3</sup> hsi<sup>2</sup> “the bedding”, cf. *MTH.*, 30.6, and Master Wang’s commentary.

The family name of this paragon of filial piety was Huang 黃. A historical personage, scion of a destitute family, he eventually became President of the Board of Ceremonies. His biography is contained in the *Hou Han shu*, ch. 110; in *GILES*, 857; in *M.*, 12.47926.121/122. His legend is told in *DORÉ*, III, vol. XIV “La doctrine du confucéisme”, p. 487; and in *PLANK*, § 19, p. 95-98 & 143-144. There we are told that the mother of Huang Hsiang died when he was “nine years old”. Master Wang does not mention this important detail. Indeed, he faced a predicament: on one hand, the bed warming feat of Wang Hsiang is, strictly speaking, the only example of filial piety, which a little boy may safely imitate; on the other hand, Master Wang finds himself in the obligation to insist, that filial piety addresses itself to both parents alike, and not just

to the father. The only solution: ignore the death of the mother.

> 黃香 “yellow fragrance” has become a euphemism for “a poop”.

Notes:

Note 1) *DORÉ* gives two lists of 24 paragons. Among all these 48 examples of filial piety, the feat of Huang Hsiang is the only one which a little boy may achieve under ordinary (meaning: non-miraculous) circumstances, and which would represent neither a health hazard to the boy, nor a nuisance to his parents. In fact, verisimilitude was not felt to be particularly desirable; nor was the grotesque a deterrent. Example: the feat of 楊香 Yang Hsiang. This adolescent boy, of 13/14 years of age, saved his father from a tiger’s jaws with his bare hands (*PLANK*, § 14, p. 141). Chinese humour has it that the father, when he saw how fiercely his son attacked the tiger, yelled at him: “Be careful, son, do not damage the fur!” In its modern version Yang Hsiang is made to be a girl (§ 14, p. 71-74). In their original version, all 48 paragons were sons (or wives of sons); however, in modern times, a need was felt to have at least one filial daughter. Making the tiger slayer Yang Hsiang “a fearless little girl”, provided clear justification of the slogan “a girl is as good as a boy” 男的女的一樣好.

Note 2) The couplet’s first line touches upon the problem of the Chinese widower: should he remarry, should he remain “a bare prick”, kuang<sup>1</sup> tier<sup>1</sup> 光丁兒? A widow, clearly, was supposed not to remarry and to end her days in chastity. For a man things were different because Chinese civilization considered male chastity impossible, conceivable only for a short time, e.g. in fulfilment of a Buddhist vow. Concomitantly Chinese civilization showed a remarkable indifference concerning the sexual preferences of the male. Providing that no public scandal arose, internal family matters were no one else’s business. However, of all the solutions to a widower’s sexual problems, his remarriage, or even his

taking a concubine, represented the greatest risk for his young children. Whereas a stepmother all over the world may be inclined to giving some preference to her own children, in China she may be tempted to kill off the young sons of the first bed. \* The stakes were high. It would have secured to her own son the all-important privilege of primogeniture, and to herself the rank of a lawful First spouse, a tablet in the ancestral temple, funeral offerings, and life after death. Hence, to a responsible father it might have appeared preferable to entrust the duties of a concubine to his young son, rather than risking to bring home the wrong woman. This is the cultural background which explains why couplet # IX mentions the bed warming in preference of all the other feats of Huang Hsiang's filial piety which we find enumerated in the more detailed account of *PLANK*: e.g., breaking firewood, preparing breakfast, carrying water, &c. Normally such duties were also incumbent to Chinese housewives (or concubines), but not as characteristically as the bed warming. Complying to modern morals, the *PLANK* text drowns the bed warming in a profusion of domestic chores.

\*) Not infrequently did such things happen within the polygynous Chinese families of yore. E.g. *Chin P'ing Mei*, where Golden Lotus trains purposely her big tomcat in such a way that he would eventually cause the death of the suckling son of her rival concubine; or *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, where the matriarch, the Old T'ai-t'ai, has Pao-yü sharing her personal quarters and her meals – for his safety's sake.

Note 3) The couplet's second verse contains an allusion to the *Li chi* suggesting that the filial piety ought to include the entire family. We must understand this line as an independent statement of general import, not limited to the person of Huang Hsiang in relation to his father.

> 親, logically and at face value, should be interpreted as 嚴親 “the strict relative”, an honorific for “father”. Indeed, Huang Hsiang's great feat of filial piety, namely the warming of his father's widowed bed, must of necessity have occurred after the mother's demise. However, Master Wang feigns

ignorance of the death of the mother, and makes Huang Hsiang warm the matrimonial bed of his parents. The acts of filial piety which he enumerates below are stereotypes taken from the *Li chi*. They have become proverbial. Hence, we may just as well translate ts'in<sup>1</sup> as “parents”, meaning parents, grandparents, the old great-grandmother. The Chinese family includes NINE generations: me in the middle, and four generations up and down.

> 九 chiu<sup>3</sup> “nine”; chiu<sup>1</sup> “to tie together, to unite”. (Notice the number of the present couplet.)

Allusion:

孝於親 alludes to *Li Chi*, Tsi t'ung, *HY*. 25/10 (C., II, p. 332), an important pericope:

夫祭之爲物大矣其興物備矣順以備者也其教之本與

是故君子之教也外則教之以尊其君長  
內則教之以孝於其親

*These sacrifices (to the ancestors) are of utmost importance. The offerings must be in their full number and they must be accordant so that their number be full. These [sacrifices,] are they not the basis of instruction? Hence, the gentleman's instruction: with regard to society, he teaches the respect of authority and seniority; with regard to the family, he teaches the practice of filial piety.*

> 親 clearly includes all family members alive and dead. This is the third allusion to ancestor worship to be found in our text (cf. # IV<sub>1</sub>-C, and # VI).

### Master Wang's Commentary

# 9-A

百行之首. 以孝爲先

po<sup>2,4,5</sup> hsing<sup>4</sup> chih<sup>1</sup> shou<sup>3</sup> . yi<sup>3</sup> hsiao<sup>4</sup> wei<sup>2</sup> hsien<sup>1</sup>

*Among all the rules of conduct, filial piety comes first.*

> 百行 all that is done, and how it is done: “activities” and “conduct, behaviour”; *M.*, 8.22679.42 quotes the *Po hu t'ung*: 孝 . 道之美 . 百行之本 *Filial piety is the perfection of the conduct, fundamental to all activities.*

> 首 *inter alia* “a principle, a rule, a model” (in # XI it will mean “first”: an elegant *distinctio*).

> 先 “comes first”, viz. in excellence, but also in time: because even a baby loves his mother (cf. 1<sub>1</sub>-F); and because all the other Chinese virtues proceed from filial piety (cf. # 11-A).

\*

### # 9-B

初學之士不可不知也

ch'u<sup>1</sup> hsioh<sup>2.5</sup> chih<sup>1</sup> shih<sup>4</sup> pu<sup>4.5</sup> k'o<sup>3</sup> pu<sup>4.5</sup> chih<sup>1</sup> yeh<sup>3</sup>

*The scholar of incipient learning cannot ignore [this].*

“this”, namely the statement made in # 9-A.

> 士 is composed of the numbers ONE 一 and TEN 十 which include all things in existence. It designates “the polymath”, a man who knows everything (or, at least, tries to broaden his knowledge). Hence, “a scholar” or “a student” (*W.* 24C).

Quotation:

> 初學 is quoted from Chu Hsi's *Ssu shu* Preface to the *Ta hsioh* (C., p. 1):

子程子曰大學孔氏之遺書而初學入德之門也  
*My teacher Ch'eng tzu said, 'The Great Learning is a book left behind by Confucius and his disciples. It is the gate through which those who begin their studies accede to potency...'*

Whereupon the text of “The Great Learning” starts with a logion of Confucius:

大學之道 . 在明明道 . 在親民 . 在止於至善  
*The tao of great learning consists in (three things, namely) shedding light upon the ways of intelligence; benefiting the*

*people; and not resting until highest excellence has been reached.*

Once again: Confucian learning is essentially aimed at a mandarin career.

> 親 is the family (cf. # IX) as well as the feelings that hold the family together. When, as in the above quotations, it links the mandarin and the populace, it corresponds in practice to the highest praise a magistrate could earn: “He was father and mother of/to the people”; and when a reshuffle took place, one would, at his departure, present him with a new pair of shoes and display his old worn shoes over the south gate of the city; whereas in case of a bad mandarin, mock paper money (such as was used for funerals) would be burned along the road (cf. *LI CHANG*, p. 88). Cf. *Tao te ching* X: 愛民治國 is a shade different: it means benevolence, not familiarity; care, not identification.

> 善 “the dialogue of sheep” (cf. # I<sub>1</sub>), viz. to achieve social harmony; and social harmony, as ascertained by the philosopher Yü, rests upon filial piety (cf. 4<sub>1</sub>-E, allusion).

Notice:

The present apodosis stands parallel to that of # 4<sub>1</sub>-B: 不可忽也. If, once again, we allow yeh<sup>3</sup> to have its basic meaning, we may at once reject as “heterodox” (異 yi<sup>4</sup>) the interpretation which would, for infant scholars (age of seven/eight years), recommend heterosexual activities. Infant marriages, albeit not unusual in former days, were deemed contrary to Confucian mores. We will, however, retain the interpretation, that our infant scholar “cannot/should not ignore his mother”. This injunction is justified by the fact that the quoted example of filial piety relates to the father only. No! Filial piety addresses itself to Father and Mother alike. In fact, among the 48 canonical examples (cf. *loc. cit.* above, # IX, notes), by far the greater number have the mother as their beneficiary.

Following this line of thought, “the vagina” (viz. “the womb that bore, and the paps that gave suck”, *ST. LUKE*,

11:27) brings to mind a problem, which should be formulated although it must remain unanswered: Within a polygamous Chinese household, all the children were considered the children of “the First”, viz. of the actual spouse. She alone was addressed as “Mother”. The concubines were addressed as “Aunt” even by her natural children (to be compared with the case of Rachel, Genesis, chap. 30). Now, after the father’s demise, what were the obligations of a decent son with regard to his natural mother? Korean as well as overseas Chinese scions of affluent families inform me that they are completely ignorant of who their mothers were. Certainly, they knew that they were not the children of the “First”, because these boys were treated differently; but they had never been informed of the identity of their natural mother: which one she was among the many women (concubines and servant girls) “in there”, meaning in the “inner apartments” which a boy leaves at the age of eight, never to return. Who cares? The sinologue curious about the fate of widowed concubines may find an answer by reading the later chapters of the *Chin P’ing Mei*, or short stories of Lu Hsün.

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# 9-C

昔漢時有江夏黃香

hsi<sup>2.5</sup> han<sup>4</sup> shih<sup>2</sup> you<sup>3</sup> chiang<sup>1</sup> hsia<sup>4</sup> huang<sup>2</sup> hsiang<sup>1</sup>

*Formerly, in Han times, there was Huang Hsiang of Chiang-hsia.*

Chiang-hsia is located in Hupei, cf. *M.*, 6.17140.33.ro.

\*

# 9-D

年九歲即知孝於親

nien<sup>2</sup> chiu<sup>3</sup> sui<sup>4</sup> tsi<sup>2.5</sup> chih<sup>1</sup> hsiao<sup>4</sup> yü<sup>2</sup> ts’in<sup>1</sup>

*When he was nine years old, he already knew to behave in a filial way towards his parents.*

When Huang Hsiang was nine years old, his mother died. The distress drew father and son closely together (as observed

in the *PLANK* text, p. 96). However, Master Wang feigns to ignore these details.

N.B.: Namely, Confucianism disapproves of intimate relations between father and son (cf. the *Lun Yü* quotation # 5<sub>1</sub>-A, end). This rule was generally observed in upper-class, Confucianist families such as the one described in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. It was certainly not observed in lower class families – quite to the contrary.

Allusion:

孝於親 cf. # IX. Within the present context, 親 appears not to include the deceased ancestors: the works of filial piety enumerated hereafter concern living persons only.

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# 9-E

1 每當夏日炎熱之時 mei<sup>3</sup> tang<sup>1</sup> hsia<sup>4</sup> jih<sup>4.5</sup> yen<sup>2</sup> je<sup>5</sup>  
chih<sup>1</sup> shi<sup>2</sup>

2 則扇父母之帷帳 tse<sup>2.5</sup> shan<sup>1</sup> fu<sup>4</sup> mu<sup>3</sup> chih<sup>1</sup> wei<sup>2</sup> chang<sup>4</sup>

3 使枕席清涼 shi<sup>3</sup> chen<sup>3</sup> hsi<sup>2.5</sup> ts'ing<sup>4</sup> liang<sup>2</sup>

4 蚤蚋遠避 wen<sup>2</sup> jui<sup>4</sup> yüan<sup>3</sup> pi<sup>4</sup>

5 以待親之安寢 yi<sup>1</sup> tai<sup>4</sup> ts'in<sup>1</sup> chih<sup>1</sup> an<sup>1</sup> ts'in<sup>3</sup>

*Whenever there was (mei<sup>3</sup> tang<sup>1</sup> ... shi<sup>2</sup>) sizzling summer heat  
he aired the curtains of his parents' [bed],  
so that (shi<sup>3</sup>) the bedding would cool off,  
and the gnats be chased away;  
and he waited until his parents had [settled] to a quiet rest.*

Notice that Huang Hsiang did all this when he was not yet nine years old. But, as already stated, Master Wang feigns ignorance of the particulars of the Huang family: indeed, he uses the specific 父母 “father and mother”.

> 以待 “to wait until...” *MTH.*, 2932.f.13-15.

Var. : 清, meaning “cool”, should be written more correctly with the “ice” radical 清. dM and Vie write the former, SC write the latter. However, both Vie and SC give, as a



phonetical definition, 清音靜 “清 sounds like tsing<sup>4</sup>”.  
 MUROHASHI : ching<sup>4</sup>. *K'ang-hsi* and *Cd.* read 清 aspirated  
 ts'ing<sup>4</sup>. The point of importance: 清, when meaning “cool”,  
 should be read in the fourth tone (and not, as normal, in the  
 first, meaning “pure”).

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## # 9-F

1 至於冬日嚴寒 chih<sup>4</sup> yü<sup>2</sup> tung<sup>1</sup> jih<sup>4.5</sup> yen<sup>2</sup> han<sup>2</sup>  
 2 則以身溫煖其親之衾裯枕席 tse<sup>2.5</sup> yi<sup>3</sup> shen<sup>1</sup> wen<sup>1</sup>  
 nuan<sup>3</sup> ch'i<sup>2</sup> ts'in<sup>1</sup> chih<sup>1</sup> ts'in<sup>1.2</sup> ch'ou<sup>2</sup> chen<sup>3</sup> hsi<sup>2.5</sup>  
 3 以待親之煖臥 yi<sup>3</sup> tai<sup>4</sup> ts'in<sup>1</sup> chih<sup>1</sup> nuan<sup>3</sup> wo<sup>4</sup>  
*And when the severe cold of winter season came,*  
*he warmed the bedding of his parents with his body*  
*and waited until his parents had [settled to] a warm repose.*

> 衾 “a quilt”.

> 裯 “a blanket”;

> 衾裯 “bedclothes” (*MTH.*, 1105.1; *R.* 5161).

> 枕 “a pillow”.

> 席 “a mat”; 枕席 “bedding” (*MTH.*, 3086; *R.* 1234).

For the terminology, cf. *Li chi*, Nei tse, *HY.* 12/8 (*C.*, I, p. 626.): *stragula, storea inferior, pulvillus.*

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## # 9-G

1 幼而行孝如此 yu<sup>4</sup> erh<sup>2</sup> hsing<sup>2</sup> hsiao<sup>4</sup> ju<sup>2</sup> tz'u<sup>3</sup>  
 2 雖云天性 sui<sup>1.2</sup> yün<sup>2</sup> t'ien<sup>1</sup> hsing<sup>4</sup>  
 3 然人子之道 jan<sup>2</sup> jen<sup>2</sup> tzu<sup>3</sup> chih<sup>1</sup> tao<sup>4</sup>  
*To practice at a young age filial piety in such a fashion,*  
*one may call it natural,*  
*but it is in fact the tao of a young gentleman.*

> 天性 “natural”; “natural disposition” *MTH.*, 6361.(b)7; for various definitions and *loci classici*, cf. *M.*, 3.5833.898.

> 人子 “a young gentleman”, cf. quotations # VIII first quotation.

Quotations:

First quotation:

孝如此 *Lun yü* & commentary, *HY.* 3/2/21 (*L.*, p. 152-153; *C.*, p. 82-83):

書云孝乎者 . 言書之言孝如此也

“*What does the Shu [ching] say about filial piety?*”  
*Paraphrase: the Shu [ching], concerning filial piety, speaks thus:* The commented sentence will be quoted below, in # 10-A.

Second quotation:

天性 *Hsiao ching* (*M.*, 3.5833.898= Mencius Preface, *C.*, p V/479):

父子之道天性也

The tao of the father-son [relation] is natural.

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# 9-H

昏定 . 晨省 *hun<sup>1</sup> ting<sup>4</sup> . ch'en<sup>2</sup> hsing<sup>3</sup>*

冬溫 . 夏清 *tung<sup>1</sup> wen<sup>1</sup> . hsia<sup>4</sup> ts'ing<sup>4</sup>*

禮當 . 然也 *li<sup>3</sup> tang<sup>1</sup> jan<sup>2</sup> yeh<sup>3</sup>*

*At dusk to fix [the parents' bed], at dawn to greet [them];  
 in winter [to procure the parents] warmth, in summer  
 refreshment:*

*this is what [the Book of] Ceremonies enjoins.*

The third line is normally quoted: 當然之理 or 理所當然 “what ought to be; what is right”, “only as it should be” (*MTH.*, 6087.9). Master Wang has changed the wording, making it artfully ambiguous. Above, 禮 was interpreted as standing for 禮記 which, indeed, contains the preceding two lines (cf. the quotation below). Or we may read: [*among all the*] ceremonies, this is the elementary one. Or even: so that male and female organs be matched in appropriate fashion (according to *li<sup>3</sup>*), viz. providing for a harmonious matrimonial intercourse of one's parents (who, by then, may be about thirty years old).

> 定省 “to bid one’s parents good-morning and good-night” (MTH., 5744.b.15). Or, rather, “good-night and good-morning”: Notice that the “day” appears to start at dusk (as in the *Bible*, cf. Gen. 1:5 &c., and in Europe, in general, until the French Revolution).

Quotation:

*Li chi*, Ch’ü li, *HY*. 1/10 (C., I, p.10-11):

凡爲人子之禮。冬溫而夏清。昏定而晨省。  
在醜夷不爭

*The ceremonies to be observed by a young gentleman: he will [procure his parents'] warmth in winter; refreshment in summer; he will fix [their bedding] at dusk, and greet [them] at dawn; and he will never quarrel with people of his own kind.*

The assonances: 2-erh-2 ts’ing<sup>4</sup> / 2 erh 2 hsing<sup>3</sup> / 1-2-2 cheng<sup>1</sup>. Master Wang suppresses the fifth duty, re-arranges the order of the remaining four, and creates a new assonance, 2 ting<sup>4</sup> / 2 hsing<sup>3</sup> / 2 wen<sup>1</sup> / 2 ts’ing<sup>4</sup>, in conformity with the popular rhyming pattern, a-a-b-a; and this is how the golden rule of Celestial family life is normally quoted.

Notice:

The fifth duty, suppressed by Master Wang, permits several interpretations:

I) The commentary’s orthodox interpretation (*M.*, 11.39969.2: *falso* 魏.):

[醜夷] 醜衆也。夷猶儕也

醜 ch’ou<sup>3</sup> equals 衆 chung<sup>4</sup> “multitude”; 夷 yi<sup>2</sup> [means] the same as 儕 ch’ai<sup>2</sup> “of the same sort”, C.: *inter pares et aequales*.

II) “Rejected meanings” (viz. translating the binome at its face value):

a) “Ugly foreigners”: namely “barbarians of the four directions (夷), [who are] ugly (醜)”, or “alcoholic (酉) devils (鬼)”. Translation: “and he will never quarrel with foreigners, be they ugly, alcoholics, or both.”

> 酉  $yu^3$  = 酒  $tsiu^3$  cf. *W.* 41G; *M.*, 11.39763.II.

N.B.: Usually, the Han Chinese are moderate drinkers – as opposed to most “barbarians of the four directions”.

b) Or rather: “and he will never quarrel (with another Chinese) *in the presence of* (在) foreigners”. Indeed, no matter how much they may hate each other, Chinese never air their dissent in the presence of foreigners.

c) By using the kanjis 猶  $yu^2$  “in similar fashion / the little monkey = the penis = man”, and 也  $yeh^3$  “a final particle / the vagina = woman” conjointly, the commentary suggests still an other interpretation for 爭  $cheng^1$ : “to have sexual intercourse”. Translation: “and he will never have sexual intercourse with foreigners”, or, if we follow the wording of the commentary: “neither with male Yi-barbarians, nor with the like females”.

Notice:

Nowadays (ca. 2000 A.D.), when many Chinese families pride themselves on having their sons study at a Western university, one has become less strict; and the idea that, once over there, the young man may take a Western girl as a concubine, appears to be accepted, a concession reluctantly made to modern times and to Western ways. However, on returning home the son is certainly expected to marry a Chinese girl of his parents' choice; that is, if he has not been given a wife before leaving for the West, and made her pregnant. As for the fate of male homosexual ties spun in the West – they are relatively numerous because homosexual ties among students accord with the traditional concepts of learning (cf. # VIII, third quotation and notice 1) – see the film “The Wedding Banquet”, hilarious and true to life.

Confucianism views the duty of perpetuating the family line as being too natural to be considered a feat of filial piety. On the contrary, it was viewed as supremely unfilial when a son (particularly the eldest) refused to get married in order to join the Buddhist or the Taoist clergy. As for the court eunuchs, they were younger sons; or, if there were none, nor

even a nephew, a father would submit himself to castration: never the eldest son. The position of court eunuch was of family tradition.

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PS: A short notice on the Chinese court eunuchs: Throughout history there have been two types of eunuchs in China: those who were criminals and had suffered castration as a legal punishment; and those who were castrated by the decision (viz. the tradition) of their own families in order to fit them for employment in the imperial palace. At times these “court eunuchs” numbered by the tens of thousands: they were more or less numerous depending on the ruling dynasty. Following after the Chinese Ming dynasty which represented the all time high, the Manchu Tai Ch'ing dynasty had their number severely reduced. But still, no dynasty could do without them: they counterbalanced the discretionary power of the mandarin and were appreciated for their loyalty. In contrast to the mandarins who never forgot the interest of their own families, the eunuchs identified their interests with the interests of the emperor.

Anything pertaining to the Palace fell within the remit of the eunuchs. First and foremost, of course, they attended to the imperial couple and to its household (including thousands of concubines). However, the various regiments of the palace guard, the workmen of the maintenance services, the gardeners, the kitchen personnel, the actors of the imperial opera – all of these too were eunuchs. The entire palace administration was in their hands.

Whereas a mandarin only saw his emperor at audiences and communicated with him in writing, the eunuchs had direct access to the ear of the emperor (and of his favorites). Eunuchs were excluded from governmental affairs, but they were omnipresent as office boys. Not surprisingly, the eunuchs were dreaded by the mandarin which punished them with silence, contempt and slander. Traditionally the mandarin was Confucianist – the Palace (including, in private, the Emperor) was devoted to Taoism or to Buddhism (of the Tibetan observance, “Lamaism”): their common monastic ideal appealed to the eunuchs; whereas Confucianism and its cult of the family, had no affinity with them. However, neither Buddhism nor Taoism recommended castration as a mean towards monastic chastity (which, in any case, meant only the abstention from women).



(Deference towards the elder brother) K'ung Yung chooses the smallest pear (cf. # 10-F).