

HIGHER EDUCATION

大 學

A NEW TRANSLATION

BY KU HUNG-MING, M.A. (EDIN.)

(GŪ HÓNGMÍNG, 辜鴻銘)

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The following is a new translation of one of the four books in the Confucian Bible which has been translated by Dr. Legge as the "Great Learning." This *Ta Hsüeh* (大學), the "Method of Higher Education," together with the *Chung Yung* (中庸), the "Universal Order or Conduct of Life," forms what may be called the Catechism of the Confucian Teaching. When first publishing my translation of the *Chung Yung* some ten years ago, I said: "It was my intention to publish these two books together; but I have not been able to bring my translation of the other book into a shape to satisfy the standard at which I aim at in my translation." Now the present translation is, in my humble opinion, fit to be presented to the public. I therefore venture to offer it to the consideration of educated men who are really and sincerely interested in the cause of education in China and in the world.

In order to make the sequence of thought more intelligible, I have ventured to slightly rearrange the text as adopted by the great Chinese commentator Chu Hsi (朱熹) and followed by Dr. Legge. The book consists of the text of Confucius and commentary or explanation of the text by a disciple.

Ku Hung-Ming, Peking, 1915

THE TEXT OF CONFUCIUS

The object of a Higher Education is to bring out (明) the intelligent (明) moral power (德) of our nature; to make a new and better society (lit. people)¹; and to enable us to abide in the highest excellence.²

When a man has a standard of excellence before him, and only then, will he have a fixed and definite purpose; with a fixed and definite purpose, and only then, will he be able to have peace and tranquillity of mind; with tranquillity of mind, and only then, will he be able to have peace and tranquillity of soul; with peace and serenity of soul, and only then, can he devote himself to deep, serious thinking and reflection; and it is only by deep, serious thinking and reflection that a man can attain true culture.³

COMMENTARY

I

1. The *Commission of Investiture to Prince K'ang* says:
“He (the Emperor Wen) succeeded in making manifest the power of his moral nature.”
2. In the *Address of the Minister I-Yin to the Emperor T'ai Chia*, it is said:
“He (the great Emperor T'ang) kept constantly before him the clear Ordinance of God.”
3. In the *Memorial Record of the Emperor Yao*, it is said:
“He succeeded in making manifest the lofty sublimity of his moral nature.”
4. Thus all these men made manifest the intelligent moral power of their nature.

This section explains what “to bring out the intelligent power of our nature,” means.

¹ Montesquieu says: “The first motive which ought to impel us to study, is the desire to augment the excellence of our nature and to render an intelligent being yet more intelligent.”

² Matthew Arnold says: “There is of culture another view, – in which all the love of our neighbour, the desire for removing human error, clearing human confusion, and diminishing human misery, the noble aspiration to leave the world better and happier than we found it, – motives eminently such as are called social, – come in as part of the grounds of culture, and the main and pre-eminent part. Culture is then properly described, not as having its origin in curiosity, but as having its origin in the love of perfection; it is a study of perfection.”

³ Goethe says: “Religious Piety is not an end, but only the means by which through perfect calmness and tranquillity of mind, to attain the highest culture.”

II

1. The *Inscription on the Emperor T'ang's bath* says:
“Be a new man each day; from day to day be a new man; every day be a new man.”
2. The *Commission of Investiture to Prince K'ang* says:
“Create a new society.”
3. The *Book of Songs* says:

*Although the Royal House of Chou was an old State,
a new Mission was given to it.*
4. Therefore whatever a gentleman finds for his hands to do, he doeth with all his might.

This section explains what “to make a new and better society,” means.

III

1. The *Book of Songs* says:

*The Imperial Domain was a thousand li wide;
within it all the people found their abode.*
2. The *Book of Songs*, again, says:

*The twittering yellow bird has found its abode on the side of a
little hill.*

Confucius commenting on this said:

“In choosing their abode, even the birds know what to choose. Can it be that man is less intelligent than birds?”

3. The *Book of Songs* says:

*Profoundly serious was the Emperor Wen.
Ah! how earnestly he strove to realize his ideals.*

As a ruler, his ideal was to love mankind. As a subject, his ideal was to respect authority. As a son his ideal was to be a dutiful son. As a father, his ideal was to be kind to his children. In intercourse with his fellow men, his ideal was to be faithful and true.

4. The *Book of Songs* says:

*Look where the river forms a nook,
How trim the fresh green bamboos are;
So full of grace is he, – our Prince,
Like ivory finely cut and filed;
Like a gem chiselled, ground and ground again.
Oh! how distinguished and calm he looks,
Oh! how majestic and grand his air;
So full of grace is he, – our Prince,
Oh! His glory will never end.*

The words “cut and filed” refer to the care that he took to improve his knowledge. The words “chiselled and ground” refer to the care that he took to make himself perfect. The words “how distinguished and calm he looks” show the seriousness of his mind. The words “how majestic and grand his air” show the dignity of his manners. Lastly, the words, “So full of grace is he – our Prince, Oh! His glory will never end,” means that when glorious moral qualities are brought to such perfection, the people will never forget them.

5. The *Book of Songs* says:
“Ah, the former kings are not forgotten!”

The higher classes appreciate their great moral qualities and love them. The lower classes are made happier and enjoy the benefits derived from their work. In this way they attain immortality.

This section explains what “to abide in the highest excellence,” means.

THE TEXT OF CONFUCIUS

Men in old times when they wanted to further the cause of enlightenment and civilization in the world began first by securing good government in their country. When they wanted to secure good government in their country, they began first by putting their house in order. When they wanted to put their house in order, they began first by ordering their conversation aright. When they wanted to put their conversation aright, they began first by putting their minds in a proper and well-ordered condition. When they wanted to put their minds in a proper and well-ordered condition, they began first by getting true ideas.⁴ When they wanted to have true ideas, they began first by acquiring knowledge and understanding. The acquirement of knowledge and understanding comes from a systematic study of things.

After a systematic study of things, and only then, knowledge and understanding will come. When knowledge and understanding have come, and only then, will men have true ideas. When men have true ideas, and only then, will their minds be in a proper and well-ordered condition. When men's minds are in a proper and well-ordered condition, and only then, will their conversation be ordered aright. When men's conversations are ordered aright, and only then, will their houses be kept in order. When men's houses are kept in order, and only then, will there be good government in the country. When there is good government in all countries, and only then, will there be peace and order in the world.

COMMENTARY

IV

1. In physical nature, there are causes and effects. In human affairs, there are springs of actions and consequences. When a man knows that he must first attend to the one before he can deal with the other, he is then not far from the truth. From the Emperor down to the lowest of the common people, the one thing that all must do is to make the ordering of their conversation aright, the foundation for everything. When the foundation is in disorder, that which is built on it will not be in order. When that which is essential is neglected, that which is not essential can never be properly attended to.
2. Confucius says:
“In deciding lawsuits, I am not better than other men. But what I make it a point to do is – I try to make lawsuits impossible. Men who come before me without a just cause have nothing to say for themselves.”
Watch therefore with fear and trembling over the hearts of the people. That is the root of the matter in knowledge. That is the highest knowledge.

⁴ True ideas of themselves and of the world. The words 誠意 are the Chinese equivalent of the Socratic “Know thyself.”

V

1. Now what is meant by “to have true ideas” is to have no self-deception, as when one hates a bad smell or loves what is beautiful. That is what is called self-detachment.⁵ Therefore a gentleman watches diligently over his secret thought.
2. When he is alone, there is no evil which an immoral man will not do; but when he sees a gentleman, he immediately disguises himself and conceals what is evil and shows off what is good within him. But men see through us as though our hearts and reins lay open to them. What is the use then of concealing? That is what is meant by the saying that what is truly within will surely show without. Therefore a gentleman watches diligently over his secret thought.
3. The disciple of Confucius, Tseng-tzu, says:
“When you know that ten eyes are looking upon you and ten fingers are pointing at you, is it not awful?”
4. Wealth embellishes a house, but moral qualities embellish the person. When the mind is free and easy, the body will grow in flesh. Therefore a gentleman must have true ideas.

VI

1. Now what is meant by saying that the ordering of one’s conversation aright depends upon putting the state of the mind in a proper and well-ordered condition, is this. When a person is under the influence of passion, his mind is not in a proper and well-ordered condition. When he is under the influence of fear and terror, his mind is not in a proper and well-ordered condition. When he is under the influence of pleasure and amusement, his mind is not in a proper and well-ordered condition. When he is under the influence of sorrow and distress, his mind is not in a proper and well-ordered condition.
2. When the mind is absent, we look, but do not see; we hear but do not understand; we eat, but do not know the taste of that which we eat.
3. This is what is meant by saying that the ordering of one’s conversation aright depends upon putting the state of the mind in a proper and well-ordered condition.

⁵ In order to have true ideas, Matthew Arnold says you must see “the object as in itself it really is,” and in order to do that, “you must get yourself out of the way.”

VII

1. Now what is meant by saying that putting one's house in order depends upon the ordering of his conversation aright, is this. Men are biased towards those for whom they feel love and affection; biased towards those of whom they despise and dislike; towards those for whom they feel pity and compassion; biased towards those towards whom they feel arrogance and pride. Wherefore it is that there are few men in the world who love and yet know the bad qualities of those whom they love; who hate and yet know the good qualities of those whom they hate.
2. Hence it is said in the common adage:
“No man knows the wickedness of his son, no man knows the richness of his crops.”
3. This is what is meant by saying that unless you order your conversation aright, you cannot put your house in order.

VIII

1. Now what is meant by saying that in order to have good government in the country, one must first put one's house in order, is this. He who cannot teach the members of his own family to be good, can never teach other people to be good. Hence the moral man, without going out of his house, can learn the duties which he owes to the State. The duties of a good son will teach him how to serve his Sovereign. The duties of subordination in the family will teach him to respect authority. The kindness of a father to his children will teach him how to treat the multitude.
2. The *Commission of Investiture to Prince K'ang* says:
“Watch over the people as a mother watches over her new born child.”
A mother who seeks with her whole heart the good of her child, although she makes mistakes, will never go wholly wrong. No girl ever had to learn how to take care of her child before marriage.
3. When there is kindness and humanity in one family, the whole nation will grow kind and humane. When there is courtesy and politeness in one family, the whole nation will all become polite and courteous. The ambition and perversity of one man, on the other hand, may bring to confusion and anarchy the whole nation. Such is the power of influence. Hence the saying: “One word can ruin everything; one man can save a nation.”

4. The Emperors Yao and Shun set up humanity as their principle in governing the Empire, and the people responded and became humane. The Emperors Chieh and Chou set up cruelty as their principle in governing the Empire, and the people responded and became cruel. When rulers give orders which are contrary to that which they themselves love to practise, the people will not obey them. Therefore, before requiring any moral quality of the people, the ruler must himself have that moral quality; before condemning any vice in the people, he must himself be free of that vice. A man who does not consider his own moral condition can never influence others for good.

5. Therefore government in a country depends upon putting one's house in order.

6. The *Book of Songs* says:

*The peach tree is tender and fair,
With its leaves all in bloom;
The girl is going to her new home,
She will rightly order her household.*

Only when there is order in the household, is it possible to teach the people of the nation to be good.

7. The *Book of Songs* says:

*Do your duty to your elder brothers,
Do your duty to your younger brothers.*

Only when a man has done his duty to his brothers at home, can he teach the people of the nation to be good.

8. The *Book of Songs* says:

*His manners were without reproach.
He therefore brought the whole nation to order.*

Thus only when the ruler is fit to be to his people a model father, a model son and a model brother, will the people take him as their model.

9. This is, then, what is meant by saying that good government in a country depends upon putting one's house in order.

IX

1. Now what is meant by saying that peace and order throughout the world depend upon having good government in one's own country, is this. When those in authority honour old age, the people will become dutiful sons. When those in authority respect and obey their superiors, the people will all become good citizens. When those in authority take care of the poor and helpless, the people will not neglect them. Thus a gentleman has a self-measuring rule.
2. What a man hates in the conduct of those who are above him, let him not show it in his treatment of those who are under him. What he hates in the conduct of those who are under him, let him not show it when doing his duty to those who are above him. What he hates in the conduct of those who go before him, let him not be the first to show in dealing with those who come after him. What he hates in the conduct of those who come after him, let him not follow their example and show in dealing with those who go before him. What he hates in the conduct of those who are on the right hand of him, let him not show in dealing with those who are on the left hand of him. What he hates in the conduct of those who are on the left hand of him, let him not show in dealing with those who are on the right hand of him. This is what is called a self-measuring rule.
3. The *Book of Songs* says:
“How the people love the prince who is a father and a mother to the people.”

To love what the people love and to hate what the people hate: that is what is meant by being a father and a mother to the people.

4. The *Book of Songs* says:

*Lofty like the southern hill,
With its rugged mass of rocks;
Awful you are, my lord of Yin,
The people all look up to you.*

Those who are responsible for the government of a nation cannot be too careful in what they do. The least mistake on their part will have awful consequences to the world.

5. The *Book of Songs* says:

*Before the Yin rulers had lost the hearts of the people,
They found favour in the sight of God;
Take warning then from the House of Yin,
The great High Mission is not easy to hold.*

This means that when a ruler gains the heart of the people, he will gain the kingdom; when he loses the hearts of the people, he will lose the kingdom.

6. Therefore the first care of the ruler is to make sure that he has the moral qualities. Who has the moral qualities, has the people; who has the people, has the land; who has the land, has the revenue; who has the revenue, has the power to use it.
7. Moral qualities are the foundation of a nation. Wealth is but the means. When the ruler mistakes the end for the means and the means for the end, the result will be rapine and scrambling for wealth among the people. Therefore the accumulation of wealth in a few hands leads to the dissolution of Society, while the distribution of wealth among the many contributes to the stability of Society.
8. Hence it is said:
“Words spoken in violence will return again with violence, and wealth gotten by violence will be taken away by violence.”
9. The *Commission of Investiture to Prince K’ang* says:
“The Divine Mission is not given us for ever,” that is to say, if we are good, we shall win it; if we are not good, we shall lose it.
10. In the *History of the Kingdom of C’hu* it is said:
“There is naught that the people of C’hu deem precious; goodness alone they deem precious.”
11. Fan, the uncle of Duke Wen of the Kingdom of T’sin, while the Duke was in exile abroad, said:
“Our Prince now in exile considers nothing as precious; he only holds as precious his love for his parents.”
12. In his speech from the Throne, the Duke of T’sin said:
“Let me have as my Minister a plain and simple man who has absolutely no other qualification except a free and open mind and a broad and tolerant spirit; who regards the possession of abilities by others as if he possessed them himself; who shows his broad and tolerant spirit by taking the same delight in the superior intelligence of others as he would were it his own. Such a man will be able to protect our children and grandchildren, the black-haired people. He will benefit us in every way. A man, on the other hand, who, when he sees others possessing abilities, is envious of and hates them; who, when he sees superior intelligence in others, shows his narrow and intolerant spirit by putting difficulties in their way, so that they cannot get known, such a man will not be able to protect our children and grandchildren, the black-haired people. He will in every way be a man dangerous to us all.”

13. It is the duty of all good men to banish such a man and drive him to live among the uncivilized heathen, not to allow him to live with us in China. This is what is meant by saying: “It is only the truly good and moral man who can love or hate others.”
14. To see men of worth and not be able to raise them to office, but to keep them in a subordinate position under you, that is gross neglect of duty. To see bad and unworthy men and not be able to remove them, – that is weakness.
15. To love and like those whom all men hate and dislike; to hate and dislike those whom all men love and like; that is to outrage the natural feeling of men. Calamities will be sure to overtake a person who thus acts.
16. Thus in life there is one great law for a gentleman. If faithful and trustworthy, he is sure to succeed; if proud and careless, he is sure to fail. In the same manner in the production of wealth there is one great law. When there are many who produce and few who consume; when those who work, work hard, and those who spend, spend slowly; then there will always be plenty of wealth in the nation.
17. Moral men make money to live. Immoral men live to make money.
18. You will never find where the rulers are human and kind that the people do not love honour and duty. You will never find where the people in a nation love honour and duty, that the affairs of that nation do not prosper, and that the wealth in the nation does not belong to the ruler.
19. The noble Lord Meng Hsien said:
“The man who keeps horses and carriages, does not look after fowls and pigs. The family that stores ice in the house, does not rear oxen and sheep. In the same manner the ruler of a nation should not keep a minister whose sole aim is to exact as much money as he can from the people. Rather than have such a minister, it were better to have a minister who openly robs him.”

This is what is meant by saying that what really makes a nation prosperous is not wealth and material prosperity, but honour and duty.
20. When a ruler who wishes to make his nation prosperous and great, devotes his attention only to questions of finance and revenue, he is surely under the influence of some base and ignoble person. When such a base and ignoble person directs the affairs of a nation, even though he be a man of ability, calamities and disaster will follow, and then even a good man who comes after him, will be able to do nothing. This, then, is what is meant by saying that what really makes a nation prosperous is not wealth and material prosperity, but honour and duty.
