

《 sān zì jīng 》

《 三 字 经 》

"Three Character Classic" Full Edition with Pinyin and English Translation

The Three Character Classic, Trimetric Classic or San Zi Jing is one of the Chinese classic texts. It was probably written in the 13th century and attributed to Wang Yinglin (王應麟, 1223--1296) during the Song Dynasty. It is also attributed to Ou Shizi (歐適子, 1234--1324).

Elementary Chinese, Three Character Classic translated by Herbert A. Giles (Shanghai, 1910)

rén zhī chū , xìng běn shàn 。

人 之 初 ， 性 本 善 。

Men at their birth are naturally good.

xìng xiāng jìn , xí xiāng yuǎn 。

性 相 近 ， 习 相 远 。

Their natures are much the same; their habits become widely different.

gǒu bù jiāo , xìng nǎi qiān 。

苟 不 教 ， 性 乃 迁 。

If foolishly there is no teaching, the nature will deteriorate.

jiāo zhī dào , guì yǐ zhuān 。

教 之 道 ， 贵 以 专 。

The right way in teaching, is to attach the utmost importance to thoroughness.

xī mèng mǔ , zé lín chù 。

昔 孟 母 ， 择 邻 处 。

Of old, the mother of Mencius chose a neighbourhood;

zǐ bù xué , duàn jī zhù 。

子 不 学 ， 断 机 杼 。

and when her child would not learn, she broke the shuttle from the loom.

dòu yàn shān , yǒu yì fāng 。

窦 燕 山 ， 有 义 方 。

Tou of the Swallow Hills had the right method.

jiāo wǔ zǐ , míng jù yáng 。

教 五 子 ， 名 俱 扬 。

He taught five sons, each of whom raised the family reputation.

yǎng bù jiāo , fù zhī guò 。

养 不 教 ， 父 之 过 。

To feed without teaching is the father's fault.

jiāo bù yán , shī zhī duò 。

教 不 严 ， 师 之 惰 。

To teach without severity is the teacher's laziness.

zǐ bù xué , fēi suǒ yí 。

子不学，非所宜。

If the child does not learn, this is not as it should be.

yòu bù xué , lǎo hé wéi 。

幼不学，老何为。

If he does not learn while young, what will he be when old

yù bù zhuó , bù chéng qì 。

玉不琢，不成器。

If jade is not polished, it cannot become a thing of use.

rén bù xué , bù zhī yì 。

人不学，不知义。

If a man does not learn, he cannot know his duty towards his neighbour.

wéi rén zǐ , fāng shǎo shí 。

为人子，方少时。

He who is the son of a man, when he is young

qīn shī yǒu , xí lǐ yí 。

亲师友，习礼仪。

should attach himself to his teachers and friends, and practise ceremonial usages.

xiāng jiǔ líng , néng wēn xí 。

香九龄，能温席。

Hsiang, at nine years of age, could warm (his parents') bed.

xiào yú qīn , suǒ dāng zhí 。

孝于亲，所当执。

Filial piety towards parents, is that to which we should hold fast.

róng sì suì , néng ràng lí 。

融四岁，能让梨。

Jung, at four years of age, could yield the (bigger) pears.

dì yú cháng , yí xiān zhī 。

弟于长，宜先知。

To behave as a younger brother towards elders, is one of the first things to know.

shǒu xiào dì , cì jiàn wén 。

首孝弟，次见闻。

Begin with filial piety and fraternal love, and then see and hear .

zhī mǒu shù , shí mǒu wén 。

知某数，识某文。

Learn to count, and learn to read.

yì ér shí , shí ér bǎi 。

一而十，十而百。

Units and tens, then tens and hundreds,

bǎi ér qiān , qiān ér wàn 。

百而千，千而万。

hundreds and thousands, thousands and tens of thousands.

sān cái zhě , tiān dì rén 。

三才者，天地人。

The Three Forces are Heaven, Earth, and Man.

sān guāng zhě , rì yuè xīng 。

三光者，日月星。

The Three Luminaries are the sun, the moon and the stars.

sān gāng zhě , jūn chén yì 。

三纲者，君臣义。

The Three Bonds are (1) the obligation between sovereign and subject,

fù zǐ qīn , fū fù shùn 。

父子亲，夫妇顺。

(2) the love between father and child, (3) the harmony between husband and wife.

yuē chūn xià , yuē qiū dōng 。

曰春夏，曰秋冬。

We speak of spring and summer, we speak of autumn and winter.

cǐ sì shí , yùn bù qióng 。

此四时，运不穷。

These four seasons revolve without ceasing.

yuē nán běi , yuē xī dōng 。

曰南北，曰西东。

We speak of north and south, we speak of east and west.

cǐ sì fāng , yīng hū zhōng 。

此四方，应乎中。

These four points respond to the requirements of the centre.

yuē shuǐ huǒ , mù jīn tǔ 。

曰水火，木金土。

We speak of water, fire, wood, metal and earth.

cǐ wǔ xíng , běn hū shù 。

此五行，本乎数。

These five elements have their origin in number.

yuē rén yì , lǐ zhì xìn 。

曰仁义，礼智信。

We speak of charity of heart and of duty towards one's neighbour, of propriety, of wisdom, and of truth.

cǐ wǔ cháng , bù róng wěn 。

此五常，不容紊。

These five virtues admit of no compromise.

dào liáng shū , mài shǔ jì 。

稻粱菽，麦黍稷。

Rice, spiked millet, pulse, wheat, glutinous millet and common millet.

cǐ liù gǔ , rén suǒ shí 。

此六谷，人所食。

These six grains are those which men eat.

mǎ niú yáng , jī quǎn shǐ 。

马牛羊，鸡犬豕。

The horse, the ox, the sheep, the fowl, the dog, the pig.

cǐ liù chù , rén suǒ sì 。

此六畜，人所饲。

These six animals are those which men keep.

wéi niú quǎn , gōng zuì zhù 。

惟牛犬，功最著。

Especially of the ox and dog is the merit most conspicuous;

néng gēng tián , néng shǒu hù 。

能耕田，能守户。

one can plough the fields, the other can guard the house.

mèi tiān liáng , tú shì sì 。

昧天良，屠市肆。

It is to obscure your natural goodness of disposition, to kill them and expose them for sale.

jiè wù shí , miǎn zuì chù 。

戒物食，免罪处。

Beware of eating them, and so avoid being punished.

yuē xǐ nù , yuē āi jù 。

曰喜怒，曰哀惧。

We speak of joy, of anger, we speak of pity, of fear,

ài è yù , qī qíng jù 。

爱恶欲，七情具。

of love, of hate, and of desire. These are the seven passions.

páo tǔ gé , mù shí jīn 。

匏土革，木石金。

The gourd, earthenware, skin, wood, stone, metal,

yǔ sī zhú , nǎi bā yīn 。

与丝竹，乃八音。

silk, and bamboo, yield the eight musical sounds.

gāo zēng zǔ , fù ér shēn 。

高曾祖，父而身。

Great great grandfather, great grandfather, grandfather, father and self,

shēn ér zǐ , zǐ ér sūn 。

身而子，子而孙。

self and son, son and grandson,

zì zǐ sūn , zhì yuán céng 。

自子孙，至元曾。

from son and grandson, on to great grandson and great great grandson.

nǎi jiǔ zú , ér zhī lún 。

乃九族，而之伦。

These are the nine agnates, constituting the kinships of man.

fù zǐ ēn , fū fù cóng 。

父子恩，夫妇从。

Affection between father and child, harmony between husband and wife,

xiōng zé yǒu , dì zé gōng 。

兄则友，弟则恭。

friendliness on the part of elder brothers, respectfulness on the part of younger brothers,

zhǎng yòu xù , yǒu yǔ péng 。

长幼序，友与朋。

precedence between elders and youngers, as between friend and friend,

jūn zé jìng , chén zé zhōng 。

君则敬，臣则忠。

respect on the part of the sovereign, loyalty on the part of the subject.

cǐ shí yì , rén suǒ tóng 。

此十义，人所同。

These ten obligations are common to all men.

fán xùn méng , xū jiǎng jiū 。

凡训蒙，须讲究。

In the education of the young, there should be explanation and elucidation,

xiáng xùn gǔ , míng jù dòu 。

详训诂，名句读。

Careful teaching of the interpretations of commentators, and due attention to paragraphs and sentences.

wéi xué zhě , bì yǒu chū 。

为学者，必有初。

Those who are learners must have a beginning.

xiǎo xué zhōng , zhì sì shū 。

小学终，至四书。

The "Little Learning" finished, they proceed to the "Four Books".

lún yǔ zhě , èr shí piān 。

论语者，二十篇。

There is the Lun Y ũ , in twenty sections.

qún dì zǐ , jì shàn yán 。

群弟子，记善言。

In this, the various disciples have recorded the wise sayings of Confucius.

mèng zǐ zhě , qī piān zhǐ 。

孟子者，七篇止。

The works of Mencius are comprised in seven sections.

jiǎng dào dé , shuō rén yì 。

讲道德，说仁义。

These explain the WAY and the exemplification thereof, and expound charity and duty towards one's neighbour.

zuò zhōng yōng , zǐ sī bǐ 。

作中庸，子思笔。

The "Chung Yung" was written by the pen of Tz{BR}u-ss{BR}u;

zhōng bù piān , yōng bú yì 。

中不偏，庸不易。

"Chung" (the middle) being that which does not lean towards any side, "Yung" (the course) being that which cannot be changed.

zuò dà xué , nǎi céng zǐ 。

作大学，乃曾子。

He who wrote "The Great Learning" was the philosopher Ts ê ng.

zì xiū qí , zhì píng zhì 。

自修齐，至平治。

Beginning with cultivation of the individual and ordering of the family, it goes on to government of one's own State and tranquillisation of the Empire.

xiào jīng tōng , sì shū shú 。

孝经通，四书熟。

When the "Classic of Filial Piety" is mastered, and the "Four Books" are known by heart.

rú liù jīng , shǐ kě dú 。

如六经，始可读。

The next step is to the "Six Classics", which may now be studied.

shī shū yì , lǐ chūn qiū 。

诗书易，礼春秋。

The "Books of Poetry", of "History" and of "Changes", the "Rites of the Chou Dynasty", the "Book of Rites", and the "Spring and Autumn Annals",

hào liù jīng , dāng jiǎng qiú 。

号六经，当讲求。

are called the Six Classics, which should be carefully explained and analysed.

yǒu lián shān , yǒu guī cáng 。

有连山，有归藏。

There is the "Lien shan" system, there is the "Kuei tsang",

yǒu zhōu yì , sān yì xiáng 。

有周易，三易详。

and there is the system of Changes of the Chou Dynasty; such are the three systems which elucidate the Changes.

yǒu diǎn mó , yǒu xùn gào 。

有典谟，有训诰。

There are the Regulations, the Counsels, the Instructions, the Announcements,

yǒu shì mìng , shū zhī ào 。

有誓命，书之奥。

the Oaths, the Charges; these are the profundities of the Book of History.

wǒ zhōu gōng , zuò zhōu lǐ 。

我周公，作周礼。

Our Duke of Chou drew up the Ritual of the Chou Dynasty,

zhù liù guān , cún zhì tǐ 。

著六官，存治体。

in which he set forth the duties of the six classes of officials, and thus gave a settled form to the government.

dà xiǎo dài , zhù lǐ jì 。

大小戴，注礼记。

The Elder and the Younger Tai wrote commentaries on the Book of Rites.

shù shèng yán , lǐ lè bèi 。

述圣言，礼乐备。

They published the holy words, and Ceremonies and Music were set in order.

yuē guó fēng , yuē yǎ sòng 。
曰国风，曰雅颂。

We speak of the "Kuo feng", we speak of the "Ya" and of the "Sung".

hào sì shī , dāng fěng yǒng 。
号四诗，当讽咏。

These are the four sections of the Book of Poetry, which should be hummed over and over.

shī jì wáng , chūn qiū zuò 。
诗既亡，春秋作。

When odes ceased to be made, the "Spring and Autumn Annals" were produced.

yù bāo biǎn , bié shàn è 。
寓褒贬，别善恶。

These "Annals" contain praise and blame, and distinguish the good from the bad.

sān chuán zhě , yǒu gōng yáng 。
三传者，有公羊。

The three commentaries upon the above, include that of Kung-Yang,

yǒu zuǒ shì , yǒu gù liáng 。
有左氏，有穀梁。

that of Tso, and that of Ku-Liang.

jīng jì míng , fāng dú zǐ 。
经既明，方读子。

When the classics are understood, then the writings of the various philosophers should be read.

cuō qí yào , jì qí shì 。
撮其要，记其事。

Pick out the important points in each, and take a note of all facts.

wǔ zǐ zhě , yǒu xún yáng 。
五子者，有荀杨。

The five chief philosophers are Hs ü n, Yang,

wén zhōng zǐ , jí lǎo zhuāng 。
文中子，及老庄。

W ê n Chung Tz{BR}u, Lao Tz{BR}u and Chuang Tz{BR}u.

jīng zǐ tōng , dú zhū shǐ 。
经子通，读诸史。

When the Classics and the Philosophers are mastered, the various histories should then be read,

kǎo shì xì , zhī zhōng shǐ 。
考世系，知终始。

and the genealogical connections should be examined, so that the end of one dynasty and the beginning of the next may be known.

zì xī nóng , zhì huáng dì 。

自羲农，至黄帝。

From Fu Hsi and Shên Nung on to the Yellow Emperor, --

hào sān huáng , jū shàng shì 。

号三皇，居上世。

these are called the Three Rulers, who lived in the early ages.

táng yǒu yú , hào èr dì 。

唐有虞，号二帝。

T'ang and Yu-Yü are called the Two Emperors.

xiāng yī xùn , chēng shèng shì 。

相揖逊，称盛世。

They abdicated, one after the other, and theirs was called the Golden Age.

xià yǒu yǔ , shāng yǒu tāng 。

夏有禹，商有汤。

The Hsia dynasty had Yü; and the Shang dynasty had T'ang;

zhōu wén wǔ , chēng sān wáng 。

周文武，称三王。

the Chou dynasty had Wên and Wu;-- these are called the Three Kings.

xià chuán zǐ , jiā tiān xià 。

夏传子，家天下。

Under the Hsia dynasty the throne was transmitted from father to son, making a family possession of the empire.

sì bǎi zǎi , qiān xià shè 。

四百载，迁夏社。

After four hundred years, the Imperial sacrifice passed from the House of Hsia.

tāng fá xià , guó hào shāng 。

汤伐夏，国号商。

T'ang the completer destroyed the Hsia Dynasty and the dynastic title became Shang.

liù bǎi zǎi , zhì zhòu wáng 。

六百载，至纣亡。

The line lasted for six hundred years, ending with Chou Hsin.

zhōu wǔ wáng , shǐ zhū zhòu 。

周武王，始诛纣。

King Wu of the Chou Dynasty finally slew Chou Hsin.

bā bǎi zǎi , zuì cháng jiǔ 。

八百载，最长久。

His own line lasted for eight hundred years; -- the longest dynasty of all.

zhōu zhé dōng , wáng gāng duò 。
周 辙 东 ， 王 纲 堕 。

When the Chous made tracks eastwards, the feudal bond was slackened;

chěng gān gē , shàng yóu shuì 。
逞 干 戈 ， 尚 游 说 。

the arbitrament of spear and shields prevailed; and peripatetic politicians were held in high esteem.

shǐ chūn qiū , zhōng zhàn guó 。
始 春 秋 ， 终 战 国 。

This period began with the Spring and Autumn Epoch, and ended with that of the Warring States.

wǔ bà qiáng , qī xióng chū 。
五 霸 强 ， 七 雄 出 。

Next, the Five Chieftains domineered, and the Seven Martial States came to the front.

yíng qín shì , shǐ jiān bìng 。
嬴 秦 氏 ， 始 兼 并 。

Then the House of Ch'in, descended from the Ying clan, finally united all the States under one sway.

chuán èr shì , chǔ hàn zhēng 。
传 二 世 ， 楚 汉 争 。

The throne was transmitted to Erh Shih, upon which followed the struggle between the Ch'u and the Han States.

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gāo zǔ xìng , hàn yè jiàn 。
高 祖 兴 ， 汉 业 建 。

Then Kao Tsu arose, and the House of Han was established.

zhì xiào píng , wáng mǎng cuàn 。
至 孝 平 ， 王 莽 篡 。

When we come to the reign of Hsiao P'ing, Wang Mang usurped the throne.

guāng wǔ xìng , wéi dōng hàn 。
光 武 兴 ， 为 东 汉 。

Then Kuang Wu arose, and founded the Eastern Han Dynasty.

sì bǎi nián , zhōng yú xiàn 。
四 百 年 ， 终 于 献 。

It lasted four hundred years, and ended with the Emperor Hsien.

wèi shǔ wú , zhēng hàn dǐng 。
魏 蜀 吴 ， 争 汉 鼎 。

Wei, Shu, and Wu, fought for the sovereignty of the Hans.

hào sān guó , qì liǎng jìn 。
皓 三 国 ， 气 两 晋 。

号三国，迄两晋。

They were called the Three Kingdoms, and existed until the Two Chin Dynasties.

sòng qí jì , liáng chén chéng 。

宋齐继，梁陈承。

Then followed the Sung and the Ch'i dynasties, and after them the Liang and Ch'ên dynasties

wéi nán cháo , dōu jīn líng 。

为南朝，都金陵。

These are the southern dynasties, with their capital at Nanking.

běi yuán wèi , fēn dōng xī 。

北元魏，分东西。

The northern dynasties are the Wei dynasty of the Yü-an family, which split into Eastern and Western Wei,

yǔ wén zhōu , xìng gāo qí 。

宇文周，兴高齐。

the Chou dynasty of the Yü-wen family, with the Ch'i dynasty of the Kao family.

dài zhì suí , yì tǔ yǔ 。

迨至隋，一土宇。

At length, under the Sui dynasty, the empire was united under one ruler.

bú zài chuán , shī tǒng xù 。

不再传，失统绪。

The throne was not transmitted twice, succession to power being lost.

táng gāo zǔ , qǐ yì shī 。

唐高祖，起义师。

The first Emperor of the T'ang dynasty raised volunteer troops.

chú suí luàn , chuàng guó jī 。

除隋乱，创国基。

He put an end to the disorder of the House of Sui, and established the foundations of his line.

èr shí chuán , sān bǎi zǎi 。

二十传，三百载。

Twenty times the throne was transmitted in a period of three hundred years.

liáng miè zhī , guó nǎi gǎi 。

梁灭之，国乃改。

The Liang State destroyed it, and the dynastic title was changed.

liáng táng jìn , jí hàn zhōu 。

梁唐晋，及汉周。

The Liang, the T'ang, the Chin, the Han, and the Chou,

chēng wǔ dài , jiē yǒu yóu 。

称五代，皆有由。

are called the Five Dynasties, and there was a reason for the establishment of each.

yán sòng xìng , shòu zhōu chán 。

炎宋兴，受周禅。

Then the fire-led House of Sung arose, and received the resignation of the house of Chou.

shí bā chuán , nán běi hún 。

十八传，南北混。

Eighteen times the throne was transmitted, and then the north and the south were reunited.

liáo yǔ jīn , dì hào fēn 。

辽与金，帝号纷。

Under the Liao and the Chin dynasties, there was confusion of Imperial titles;

dǎi miè liáo , sòng yóu cún 。

逮灭辽，宋犹存。

when the Liao dynasty was destroyed, the Sung dynasty still remained.

zhì yuán xìng , jīn xù xiē 。

至元兴，金绪歇。

When the Yü an dynasty arose, the line of the Chin Tartars came to an end,

yǒu sòng shì , yì tóng miè 。

有宋世，一同灭。

and the House of Sung was destroyed together with it.

bìng zhōng guó , jiān róng zhái 。

并中国，兼戎翟。

It united the Middle Kingdom, and attached to the empire the tribes of the north and west.

míng tài zǔ , jiǔ qīn shī 。

明太祖，久亲师。

The founder of the Ming dynasty was for a long time engaged in warfare.

chuán jiàn wén , fāng sì sì 。

传建文，方四祀。

He transmitted the throne to Chien Wen only four years,

qiān běi jīng , yǒng lè sì 。

迁北京，永乐嗣。

when the capital was transferred to Peking, and Yung Lo succeeded the latter.

dǎi chóng zhēn , méi shān shì 。

逮崇祯，煤山逝。

At length Ch'ung Cheng died on the Coal Hill.

liáo yú jīn , jiē chēng dì 。

辽于金，皆称帝。

The Liao Tartars and the Chin Tartars all took the Imperial title.

yuán miè jīn , jué sòng shì 。

元灭金，绝宋世。

The Yü ans (Mongols) destroyed the Chin Tartars, and put an end to the House of Sung.

lì zhōng guó , jiān róng zhái 。

莅中国，兼戎翟。

They governed the Middle Kingdom, and also the wild tribes of the north and west;

jiǔ shí nián , guó zuò fèi 。

九十年，国祚废。

after ninety years their mandate was exhausted.

tài zǔ xìng , guó dà míng 。

太祖兴，国大明。

Then T'ai Tsu arose, his dynasty being known as Ta Ming.

hào hóng wǔ , dōu jīn líng 。

号洪武，都金陵。

He took as his year-title Hung Wu, and fixed his capital at Chin-ling (Nanking).

dǎi chéng zǔ , qiān yàn jīng 。

逮成祖，迁燕京。

At length, under the Emperor Ch'êng Tsu, a move was made to Swallow City (Peking).

shí qī shì , zhì chóng zhēn 。

十七世，至崇祯。

There were seventeen reigns in all, down to and including Ch'ung Ch'êng.

quán yǎn sì , kòu rú lín 。

权奄肆，寇如林。

The hold on the people was relaxed, and rebels sprang up thick as forests.

zhì lǐ chuǎng , shén qì zhōng 。

至李闯，神器终。

Then came Li Ch'uang, and the Imperial regalia were destroyed.

qīng tài zǔ , yìng jǐng mìng 。

清太祖，应景命。

The founder of the Ch'ing or Pure dynasty responded to the glorious summons;

jìng sì fāng , kè dà dìng 。

靖四方，克大定。

he tranquillised the four quarters (N.S.E. and W.), and achieved the final settlement of the empire.

niàn èr shǐ , quán zài zī 。

廿二史，全在兹。

The Twenty-two Dynastic Histories are all embraced in the above.

zǎi zhì luàn , zhī xīng shuāi 。

载治乱，知兴衰。

They contain examples of good and bad government, whence may be learnt the principles of prosperity and decay.

dú shǐ shū , kǎo shí lù 。

读史书，考实录。

Ye who read history must study the State Annals,

tōng gǔ jīn , ruò qīn mù 。

通古今，若亲目。

whereby you will understand ancient and modern events, as though having seen them with your own eyes.

kǒu ér sòng , xīn ér wéi 。

口而诵，心而惟。

Recite them with the mouth, and ponder over them in your hearts.

cháo yú sī , xī yú sī 。

朝于斯，夕于斯。

Do this in the morning; do this in the evening.

Do this in the morning; do this in the evening.

xī zhòng ní , shī xiàng tuó 。

昔仲尼，师项橐。

Of old, Confucius took Hsiang T'o for his teacher.

gǔ shèng xián , shàng qín xué 。

古圣贤，尚勤学。

The inspired men and sages of old studied diligently nevertheless.

zhào zhōng lìng , dú lǔ lùn 。

赵中令，读鲁论。

Chao, President of the Council, studied the Lu text of the "Lun Y ü".

bǐ jì shì , xué qiě qín 。

彼既仕，学且勤。

He, when already an official, studied, and moreover with diligence.

pī pú biān , xuē zhú jiǎn 。

披蒲编，削竹简。

One opened out rushes and plaited them together; another scraped tablets of bamboo.

bǐ wú shū , qiè zhī miǎn 。

彼无书，且知勉。

These men had no books, but they knew how to make an effort.

tóu xuán liáng , zhuī cì gǔ 。

头悬梁，锥刺股。

One tied his head to the beam above him; another pricked his thigh with an awl.

bǐ bù jiāo , zì qín kǔ 。

彼不教，自勤苦。

They were not taught, but toiled hard of their own accord.

rú náng yíng , rú yìng xuě 。

如囊萤，如映雪。

Then we have one who put fireflies in a bag, and again another who used the white glare from snow.

jiā suī pín , xué bú zhuì 。

家虽贫，学不缀。

Although their families were poor, these men studied unceasingly.

rú fù xīn , rú guà jiǎo 。

如负薪，如挂角。

Again, there was one who carried fuel, and another who used horns as pegs.

shēn suī láo , yóu kǔ zhuó 。

身虽劳，犹苦卓。

Although they toiled with their bodies, they were nevertheless remarkable for their application.

sū lǎo quán , èr shí qī 。

苏老泉，二十七。

Su Lao-ch' ũ an, at the age of twenty-seven,

shǐ fā fèn , dú shū jí 。

始发愤，读书籍。

at last began to show his energy and devote himself to the study of books.

bǐ jì lǎo , yóu huǐ chí 。

彼既老，犹悔迟。

Then, when already past the age, he deeply regretted his delay.

ěr xiǎo shēng , yí zǎo sī 。

尔小生，宜早思。

You little boys should take thought betimes.

ruò liáng hào , bā shí èr 。

若梁灏，八十二。

Then there was Liang Hao, who at the age of eighty-two,

duì dà tíng , kuí duō shì 。

对大廷，魁多士。

made his replies in the great hall, and came out first among many scholars.

bǐ jì chéng , zhòng chēng yì 。

彼既成，众称异。

When thus late he had succeeded, all men pronounced him a prodigy.

ěr xiǎo shēng , yí lì zhì 。

尔小生，宜立志。

You little boys should make up your minds to work.

yíng bā suì , néng yǒng shī 。

莹八岁，能咏诗。

Jung at eight years of age, could compose poetry.

mì qī suì , néng fù qí 。

泌七岁，能赋棋。

Pi, at seven years of age, could make an epigram on "wei-ch'i".

bǐ yǐng wù , rén chēng qí 。

彼颖悟，人称奇。

These youths were quick of apprehension, and people declared them to be prodigies.

ěr yòu xué , dāng xiào zhī 。

尔幼学，当效之。

You young learners ought to imitate them.

cài wén jī , néng biàn qín 。

蔡文姬，能辨琴。

Ts'ai W ê n-chi was able to judge from the sound of a psaltery.

xiè dào yùn , néng yǒng yín 。

谢道韞，能咏吟。

Hsieh Tao-y ü n was able to compose verses.

bǐ nǚ zǐ , qiě cōng mǐn 。

彼女子，且聪敏。

They were only girls, yet they were quick and clever.

ěr nán zǐ , dāng zì jǐng 。

尔男子，当自警。

You boys ought to rouse yourselves.

táng liú yàn , fāng qī suì 。

唐刘晏，方七岁。

Liu Yen of the T'ang dynasty, when only seven years of age,

jǔ shén tóng , zuò zhèng zì 。

举神童，作正字。

was ranked as an "inspired child", and was appointed a Corrector of Texts.

bǐ suī yòu , shēn jǐ shì 。

彼虽幼，身已仕。

He, although a child, was already in an official post.

ěr yòu xué , miǎn ér zhì 。

尔幼学，勉而致。

You young learners strive to bring about a like result.

yǒu wéi zhě , yì ruò shì 。

有为者，亦若是。

Those who work will also succeed as he did.

quǎn shǒu yè , jī sī chén 。

犬守夜，鸡司晨。

The dog keeps guard by night; the cock proclaims the dawn.

gǒu bù xué , hé wéi rén 。

苟不学，曷为人。

If foolishly you do not study, how can you become men

cán tǔ sī , fēng niàng mì 。

蚕吐丝，蜂酿蜜。

The silkworm produces silk, the bee makes honey.

rén bù xué , bù rú wù 。

人不学，不如物。

If man does not learn, he is not equal to the brutes.

yòu ér xué , zhuàng ér xíng 。

幼而学，壮而行。

Learn while young, and when grown up apply what you have learnt;

shàng zhì jūn , xià zé mǐn 。

上致君，下泽民。

influencing the sovereign above; benefiting the people below.

yáng míng shēng , xiǎn fù mǔ 。

扬名声，显父母。

Make a name for yourselves, and glorify your father and mother,

guāng yú qián , yù yú hòu 。

光于前，裕于后。

shed lustre on your ancestors, enrich your posterity.

rén yí zǐ , jīn mǎn yíng 。

人遗子，金满赢。

Men bequeath to their children coffers of gold;

wǒ jiào zǐ , wéi yì jīng 。

我教子，惟一经。

I teach you children, only this book.

qín yǒu gōng , xì wú yì 。

勤有功，戏无益。

Diligence has its reward; play has no advantages,

jiè zhī zāi , yí miǎn lì 。

戒之哉，宜勉力。

Oh, be on your guard, and put forth your strength.

《三字经》 [Elementary Chinese; translated by Herbert A. Giles (Shanghai, 1910)]

Without Pinyin:

人之初，性本善。

Men at their birth are naturally good.

性相近，习相远。

Their natures are much the same; their habits become widely different.

苟不教，性乃迁。

If foolishly there is no teaching, the nature will deteriorate.

教之道，贵以专。

The right way in teaching, is to attach the utmost importance to thoroughness.

昔孟母，择邻处。

Of old, the mother of Mencius chose a neighbourhood;

子不学，断机杼。

and when her child would not learn, she broke the shuttle from the loom.

窦燕山，有义方。

Tou of the Swallow Hills had the right method.

教五子，名俱扬。

He taught five sons, each of whom raised the family reputation.

养不教，父之过。

To feed without teaching is the father's fault.

教不严，师之惰。

To teach without severity is the teacher's laziness.

子不学，非所宜。

If the child does not learn, this is not as it should be.

幼不学，老何为。

If he does not learn while young, what will he be when old

玉不琢，不成器。

If jade is not polished, it cannot become a thing of use.

人不学，不知义。

If a man does not learn, he cannot know his duty towards his neighbour.

为人子，方少时。

He who is the son of a man, when he is young

亲师友，习礼仪。

should attach himself to his teachers and friends, and practise ceremonial usages.

香九龄，能温席。

Hsiang, at nine years of age, could warm (his parents') bed.

孝于亲，所当执。

Filial piety towards parents, is that to which we should hold fast.

融四岁，能让梨。

Jung, at four years of age, could yield the (bigger) pears.

弟子长，宜先知。

To behave as a younger brother towards elders, is one of the first things to know.

首孝弟，次见闻。

Begin with filial piety and fraternal love, and then see and hear .

知某数，识某文。

Learn to count, and learn to read.

一而十，十而百。

Units and tens, then tens and hundreds,

百而千，千而万。

hundreds and thousands, thousands and tens of thousands.

三才者，天地人。

The Three Forces are Heaven, Earth, and Man.

三光者，日月星。

The Three Luminaries are the sun, the moon and the stars.

三纲者，君臣义。

The Three Bonds are (1) the obligation between sovereign and subject,

父子亲，夫妇顺。

(2) the love between father and child, (3) the harmony between husband and wife.

曰春夏，曰秋冬。

We speak of spring and summer, we speak of autumn and winter.

此四时，运不穷。

These four seasons revolve without ceasing.

曰南北，曰西东。

We speak of north and south, we speak of east and west.

此四方，应乎中。

These four points respond to the requirements of the centre.

曰水火，木金土。

We speak of water, fire, wood, metal and earth.

此五行，本乎数。

These five elements have their origin in number.

曰仁义，礼智信。

We speak of charity of heart and of duty towards one's neighbour, of propriety, of wisdom, and of truth.

此五常，不容紊。

These five virtues admit of no compromise.

稻粱菽，麦黍稷。

Rice, spiked millet, pulse, wheat, glutinous millet and common millet.

此六谷，人所食。

These six grains are those which men eat.

马牛羊，鸡犬豕。

The horse, the ox, the sheep, the fowl, the dog, the pig.

此六畜，人所饲。

These six animals are those which men keep.

惟牛犬，功最著。

Especially of the ox and dog is the merit most conspicuous;

能耕田，能守户。

one can plough the fields, the other can guard the house.

昧天良，屠市肆。

It is to obscure your natural goodness of disposition, to kill them and expose them for sale.

戒物食，免罪处。

Beware of eating them, and so avoid being punished.

曰喜怒，曰哀惧。

We speak of joy, of anger, we speak of pity, of fear,

爱恶欲，七情具。

of love, of hate, and of desire. These are the seven passions.

匏土革，木石金。

The gourd, earthenware, skin, wood, stone, metal,

与丝竹，乃八音。

silk, and bamboo,

yield the eight musical sounds.

高曾祖，父而身。

Great great grandfather, great grandfather, grandfather, father and self,

身而子，子而孙。

self and son, son and grandson,

自子孙，至元曾。

from son and grandson, on to great grandson and great great grandson.

乃九族，而之伦。

These are the nine agnates, constituting the kinships of man.

父子恩，夫妇从。

Affection between father and child, harmony between husband and wife,

兄则友，弟则恭。

friendliness on the part of elder brothers, respectfulness on the part of younger brothers,

长幼序，友与朋。

precedence between elders and youngsters, as between friend and friend,

君则敬，臣则忠。

respect on the part of the sovereign, loyalty on the part of the subject.

此十义，人所同。

These ten obligations are common to all men.

凡训蒙，须讲究。

In the education of the young, there should be explanation and elucidation,

详训诂，名句读。

careful teaching of the interpretations of commentators, and due attention to paragraphs and sentences.

为学者，必有初。

Those who are learners must have a beginning.

小学终，至四书。

The "Little Learning" finished, they proceed to the "Four Books".

论语者，二十篇。

There is the Lun Yü, in twenty sections.

群弟子，记善言。

In this, the various disciples have recorded the wise sayings of Confucius.

孟子者，七篇止。

The works of Mencius are comprised in seven sections.

讲道德，说仁义。

These explain the WAY and the exemplification thereof, and expound charity and duty towards one's neighbour.

作中庸，子思笔。

The "Chung Yung" was written by the pen of Tz{BR}u-ss{BR}u;

中不偏，庸不易。

"Chung" (the middle) being that which does not lean towards any side, "Yung" (the course) being that which cannot be changed.

作大学，乃曾子。

He who wrote "The Great Learning" was the philosopher Tsêng.

自修齐，至平治。

Beginning with cultivation of the individual and ordering of the family, it goes on to government of one's own State and tranquillisation of the Empire.

孝经通，四书熟。

When the "Classic of Filial Piety" is mastered, and the "Four Books" are known by heart.

如六经，始可读。

The next step is to the "Six Classics", which may now be studied.

诗书易，礼春秋。

The "Books of Poetry", of "History" and of "Changes", the "Rites of the Chou Dynasty", the "Book of Rites", and the "Spring and Autumn Annals",

号六经，当讲求。

are called the Six Classics, which should be carefully explained and analysed.

有连山，有归藏。

There is the "Lien shan" system, there is the "Kuei tsang",

有周易，三易详。

and there is the system of Changes of the Chou Dynasty; such are the three systems which elucidate the Changes.

有典谟，有训诰。

There are the Regulations, the Counsels, the Instructions, the Announcements,

有誓命，书之奥。

the Oaths, the Charges; these are the profundities of the Book of History.

我周公，作周礼。

Our Duke of Chou drew up the Ritual of the Chou Dynasty,

著六官，存治体。

in which he set forth the duties of the six classes of officials, and thus gave a settled form to the government.

大小戴，注礼记。

The Elder and the Younger Tai wrote commentaries on the Book of Rites.

述圣言，礼乐备。

They published the holy words, and Ceremonies and Music were set in order.

曰国风，曰雅颂。

We speak of the "Kuo feng", we speak of the "Ya" and of the "Sung".

号四诗，当讽咏。

These are the four sections of the Book of Poetry, which should be hummed over and over.

诗既亡，春秋作。

When odes ceased to be made, the "Spring and Autumn Annals" were produced.

寓褒贬，别善恶。

These "Annals" contain praise and blame, and distinguish the good from the bad.

三传者，有公羊。

The three commentaries upon the above, include that of Kung-Yang,

有左氏，有穀梁。

that of Tso, and that of Ku-Liang.

经既明，方读子。

When the classics are understood, then the writings of the various philosophers should be read.

撮其要，记其事。

Pick out the important points in each, and take a note of all facts.

五子者，有荀杨。

The five chief philosophers are Hsün, Yang,

文中子，及老庄。

Wên Chung Tz{BR}u, Lao Tz{BR}u and Chuang Tz{BR}u.

经子通，读诸史。

When the Classics and the Philosophers are mastered, the various histories should then be read,

考世系，知终始。

and the genealogical connections should be examined, so that the end of one dynasty and the beginning of the next may be known.

自羲农，至黄帝。

From Fu Hsi and Shên Nung on to the Yellow Emperor, --

号三皇，居上世。

these are called the Three Rulers, who lived in the early ages.

唐有虞，号二帝。

T'ang and Yu-Yü are called the Two Emperors.

相揖逊，称盛世。

They abdicated, one after the other, and theirs was called the Golden Age.

夏有禹，商有汤。

The Hsia dynasty had Yü; and the Shang dynasty had T'ang;

周文武，称三王。

the Chou dynasty had Wên and Wu;-- these are called the Three Kings.

夏传子，家天下。

Under the Hsia dynasty the throne was transmitted from father to son, making a family possession of the empire.

四百载，迁夏社。

After four hundred years, the Imperial sacrifice passed from the House of Hsia.

汤伐夏，国号商。

T'ang the completer destroyed the Hsia Dynasty and the dynastic title became Shang.

六百载，至纣亡。

The line lasted for six hundred years, ending with Chou Hsin.

周武王，始诛纣。

King Wu of the Chou Dynasty finally slew Chou Hsin.

八百载，最长久。

His own line lasted for eight hundred years; -- the longest dynasty of all.

周辙东，王纲堕。

When the Chous made tracks eastwards, the feudal bond was slackened;

逞干戈，尚游说。

the arbitrament of spear and shields prevailed; and peripatetic politicians were held in high esteem.

始春秋，终战国。

This period began with the Spring and Autumn Epoch, and ended with that of the Warring States.

五霸强，七雄出。

Next, the Five Chieftains domineered, and the Seven Martial States came to the front.

嬴秦氏，始兼并。

Then the House of Ch'in, descended from the Ying clan, finally united all the States under one sway.
传二世，楚汉争。

The throne was transmitted to Erh Shih, upon which followed the struggle between the Ch'u and the Han States.

高祖兴，汉业建。

Then Kao Tsu arose, and the House of Han was established.

至孝平，王莽篡。

When we come to the reign of Hsiao P'ing, Wang Mang usurped the throne.

光武兴，为东汉。

Then Kuang Wu arose, and founded the Eastern Han Dynasty.

四百年，终于献。

It lasted four hundred years, and ended with the Emperor Hsien.

魏蜀吴，争汉鼎。

Wei, Shu, and Wu, fought for the sovereignty of the Hans.

号三国，迄两晋。

They were called the Three Kingdoms, and existed until the Two Chin Dynasties.

宋齐继，梁陈承。

Then followed the Sung and the Ch'i dynasties, and after them the Liang and Ch'ên dynasties

为南朝，都金陵。

These are the southern dynasties, with their capital at Nanking.

北元魏，分东西。

The northern dynasties are the Wei dynasty of the Yüan family, which split into Eastern and Western Wei,

宇文周，兴高齐。

the Chou dynasty of the Yü-wen family, with the Ch'i dynasty of the Kao family.

迨至隋，一土宇。

At length, under the Sui dynasty, the empire was united under one ruler.

不再传，失统绪。

The throne was not transmitted twice, succession to power being lost.

唐高祖，起义师。

The first Emperor of the T'ang dynasty raised volunteer troops.

除隋乱，创国基。

He put an end to the disorder of the House of Sui, and established the foundations of his line.

二十传，三百载。

Twenty times the throne was transmitted in a period of three hundred years.

梁灭之，国乃改。

The Liang State destroyed it, and the dynastic title was changed.

梁唐晋，及汉周。

The Liang, the T'ang, the Chin, the Han, and the Chou,

称五代，皆有由。

are called the Five Dynasties, and there was a reason for the establishment of each.

炎宋兴，受周禅。

Then the fire-led House of Sung arose, and received the resignation of the house of Chou.

十八传，南北混。

Eighteen times the throne was transmitted, and then the north and the south were reunited.

辽与金，帝号纷。

Under the Liao and the Chin dynasties, there was confusion of Imperial titles;

逮灭辽，宋犹存。

when the Liao dynasty was destroyed, the Sung dynasty still remained.

至元兴，金绪歇。

When the Yüan dynasty arose, the line of the Chin Tartars came to an end,
有宋世，一同灭。

and the House of Sung was destroyed together with it.

并中国，兼戎翟。

It united the Middle Kingdom, and attached to the empire the tribes of the north and west.

明太祖，久亲师。

The founder of the Ming dynasty was for a long time engaged in warfare.

传建文，方四祀。

He transmitted the throne to Chien Wên only four years,

迁北京，永乐嗣。

when the capital was transferred to Peking, and Yung Lo succeeded the latter.

逮崇祯，煤山逝。

At length Ch'ung Chêng died on the Coal Hill.

辽于金，皆称帝。

The Liao Tartars and the Chin Tartars all took the Imperial title.

元灭金，绝宋世。

The Yüans (Mongols) destroyed the Chin Tartars, and put an end to the House of Sung.

莅中国，兼戎翟。

They governed the Middle Kingdom, and also the wild tribes of the north and west;

九十年，国祚废。

after ninety years their mandate was exhausted.

太祖兴，国大明。

Then T'ai Tsu arose, his dynasty being known as Ta Ming.

号洪武，都金陵。

He took as his year-title Hung Wu, and fixed his capital at Chin-ling (Nanking).

逮成祖，迁燕京。

At length, under the Emperor Ch'êng Tsu, a move was made to Swallow City (Peking).

十七世，至崇祯。

There were seventeen reigns in all, down to and including Ch'ung Chêng.

权奄肆，寇如林。

The hold on the people was relaxed, and rebels sprang up thick as forests.

至李闯，神器终。

Then came Li Ch'uang, and the Imperial regalia were destroyed.

清太祖，应景命。

The founder of the Ch'ing or Pure dynasty responded to the glorious summons;

靖四方，克大定。

he tranquillised the four quarters (N.S.E. and W.), and achieved the final settlement of the empire.

廿二史，全在兹。

The Twenty-two

Dynastic Histories are all embraced in the above.

载治乱，知兴衰。

They contain examples of good and bad government, whence may be learnt the principles of prosperity and decay.

读史书，考实录。

Ye who read history must study the State Annals,

通古今，若亲目。

whereby you will

understand ancient and modern events, as though having seen them with your own eyes.

口而诵，心而惟。

Recite them with the mouth, and ponder over them in your hearts.

朝于斯，夕于斯。

Do this in the morning; do this in the evening.

昔仲尼，师项橐。

Of old, Confucius took Hsiang T'o for his teacher.

古圣贤，尚勤学。

The inspired men and sages of old studied diligently nevertheless.

赵中令，读鲁论。

Chao, President of the Council, studied the Lu text of the "Lun Yü".

彼既仕，学且勤。

He, when already an official, studied, and moreover with diligence.

披蒲编，削竹简。

One opened out rushes and plaited them together; another scraped tablets of bamboo.

彼无书，且知勉。

These men had no books, but they knew how to make an effort.

头悬梁，锥刺股。

One tied his head to the beam above him; another pricked his thigh with an awl.

彼不教，自勤苦。

They were not taught, but toiled hard of their own accord.

如囊萤，如映雪。

Then we have one who put fireflies in a bag, and again another who used the white glare from snow.

家虽贫，学不辍。

Although their families were poor, these men studied unceasingly.

如负薪，如挂角。

Again, there was one who carried fuel, and another who used horns as pegs.

身虽劳，犹苦卓。

Although they toiled with their bodies, they were nevertheless remarkable for their application.

苏老泉，二十七。

Su Lao-ch'üan, at the age of twenty-seven,

始发愤，读书籍。

at last began to show his energy and devote himself to the study of books.

彼既老，犹悔迟。

Then, when already past the age, he deeply regretted his delay.

尔小生，宜早思。

You little boys should take thought betimes.

若梁灏，八十二。

Then there was Liang Hao, who at the age of eighty-two,

对大廷，魁多士。

made his replies

in the great hall, and came out first among many scholars.

彼既成，众称异。

When thus late he had succeeded, all men pronounced him a prodigy.

尔小生，宜立志。

You little boys should make up your minds to work.

莹八岁，能咏诗。

Jung at eight years of age, could compose poetry.

泌七岁，能赋棋。

Pi, at seven years of age, could make an epigram on "wei-ch'i".

彼颖悟，人称奇。

These youths were quick of apprehension, and people declared them to be prodigies.

尔幼学，当效之。

You young learners ought to imitate them.

蔡文姬，能辨琴。

Ts'ai Wên-chi was able to judge from the sound of a psaltery.

谢道韞，能咏吟。

Hsieh Tao-yün was able to compose verses.

彼女子，且聪敏。

They were only girls, yet they were quick and clever.

尔男子，当自警。

You boys ought to rouse yourselves.

唐刘晏，方七岁。

Liu Yen of the T'ang dynasty, when only seven years of age,

举神童，作正字。

was ranked as an "inspired child", and was appointed a Corrector of Texts.

彼虽幼，身已仕。

He, although a child, was already in an official post.

尔幼学，勉而致。

You young learners strive to bring about a like result.

有为者，亦若是。

Those who work will also succeed as he did.

犬守夜，鸡司晨。

The dog keeps guard by night; the cock proclaims the dawn.

苟不学，曷为人。

If foolishly you do not study, how can you become men

蚕吐丝，蜂酿蜜。

The silkworm produces silk, the bee makes honey.

人不学，不如物。

If man does not learn, he is not equal to the brutes.

幼而学，壮而行。

Learn while young, and when grown up apply what you have learnt;

上致君，下泽民。

influencing the sovereign above; benefiting the people below.

扬名声，显父母。

Make a name for yourselves, and glorify your father and mother,

光于前，裕于后。

shed lustre on your ancestors, enrich your posterity.

人遗子，金满赢。

Men bequeath to their children coffers of gold;

我教子，惟一经。

I teach you children, only this book.

勤有功，戏无益。

Diligence has its reward; play has no advantages,

戒之哉，宜勉力。

Oh, be on your guard, and put forth your strength.