I The Scope and Meaning of the Treatise

(Once), when Zhong Ni① was unoccupied, and his disciple Zeng② was sitting by in attendance on him, the Master said, "The ancient kings had a perfect virtue and all-embracing rule of conduct, through which they were in accord with all under heaven. By the practice of it the people were brought to live in peace and harmony, and there was no ill-will between superiors and inferiors. Do you know what it was?"

Zeng rose from his mat and said, "How should I, Shen, who am so devoid of intelligence, be able to know this?"

The Master said, "(It was filial piety.) Now filial piety is the root of (all) virtue,③and (the stem) out of which grows (all moral) teaching. Sit down again, and I will explain the subject to you. Our bodies—to every hair and bit of skin—are received by us from our parents, and we must not presume to injure or wound them. This is the beginning of filial piety. When we have established our character by the practice of the (filial) course, so as to make our name famous in future ages and thereby glorify our parents, this is the end of filial piety. It commences with the service of parents; it proceeds to the service of the ruler; it is completed by the establishment of character.

"It is said in the Major Odes of the Kingdom:

Ever think of your ancestor,

Cultivating your virtue."④

*Notes*

*1This is the zi or "style" of Confucius.*

*2Zeng Zi speaks in fourteen sayings in the Analects, e.g., 1.4. He names himself a bit later by his ming or "given name," Shen. His name is traditionally associated with the virtue of filial piety; see, for example, Analects 1.9 & 19.17 & 18.*

*3"All virtue" means the five virtuous principles, the constituents of humanity: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, knowledge, and fidelity.*

*4Shi III, i, ode 1, stanza 6, p. 431. Mao 235.*

II Filial Piety in the Son of Heaven

The Master said, "He who loves his parents will not dare (to incur the risk of) being hated by any man, and he who reveres his parents will not dare (to incur the risk of) being contemned by any man.① When the love and reverence (of the Son of Heaven) are thus carried to the utmost in the service of his parents, the lessons of his virtue affect all the people, and he becomes a pattern to (all within) the four seas. This is the filial piety of the Son of Heaven.

"It is said in (the Marquis of) Fu on Punishments:

The One man will have felicity,

and the millions of the people will depend on (what ensures his happiness)."②

***Notes***

*1Many translators have missed the passive force of this construction.*

*2Shu Jing, vol III of The Chinese Classics, p. 600.*

III Filial Piety in the Princes of States

"Above others, and yet free from pride, they dwell on high, without peril. Adhering to economy and carefully observant of the rules and laws, they are full, without overflowing. To dwell on high without peril is the way long to preserve nobility; to be full without overflowing is the way long to preserve riches. When their riches and nobility do not leave their persons, then they are able to preserve the altars of their land and grain, and to secure the harmony of their people and men in office.① This is the filial piety of the princes of states.

"It is said in the Book of Poetry:

Be apprehensive, be cautious,

As if on the brink of a deep abyss,

As if treading on thin ice."2

***Notes***

*1The king had a great altar to the spirit (or spirits) presiding over the land. The color of the earth in the center of it was yellow; that on each of its four sides differed according to the colors assigned to the four quarters of the sky. A portion of this earth was cut away and formed the nucleus of a corresponding altar in each feudal state, according to their position relative to the capital. The prince of the state had the prerogative of sacrificing there. A similar rule prevailed for the altars to the spirits presiding over the grain. So long as a family ruled in a state, so long its chief offered those sacrifices; and the extinction of the sacrifices was an emphatic way of describing the ruin and extinction of the ruling house.*

IV Filial Piety in High Ministers and Great Officers

"They do not presume to wear robes other than those appointed by the laws of the ancient kings, nor to speak words other than those sanctioned by their speech, nor to exhibit conduct other than that exemplified by their virtuous ways. Thus none of their words being contrary to those sanctions, and none of their actions contrary to the (right) way, from their mouths there comes no exceptionable speech, and in their conduct there are found no exceptionable actions. Their words may fill all under heaven, and no error of speech will be found in them. Their actions may fill all under heaven, and no dissatisfaction or dislike will be awakened by them. When these three things—(their robes, their words, and their conduct)—are all complete as they should be, they can then preserve their ancestral temples.① this is the filial piety of high ministers and great officers.

"It is said in the Book of Poetry:

He is never idle, day or night,

In the service of the One man."

***Notes***

*1Their ancestral temples were to the ministers and grand officers what the altars of their land and grain were to the feudal lords. Every great officer had three temples or shrines, in which he sacrificed to the first chief of his family or clan, to his grandfather, and to his father. While these remained, the family remained, and its honors were prepetuated.*

V Filial Piety in Inferior Officers

"As they serve their fathers, so they serve their mothers, and they love them equally. As they serve their fathers, so they serve their rulers, and they reverence them equally. Hence love is what is chiefly rendered to the mother, and reverence is what is chiefly rendered to the ruler, while both of these things are given to the father. Therefore when they serve their ruler with filial piety, they are loyal; when they serve their superiors with reverence, they are obedient. Not failing in this loyalty and obedience in serving those above them, they are then able to preserve their emoluments and positions, and to maintain their sacrifices.①This is the filial piety of inferior officers.②

"It is said in the Book of Poetry:

Rising early and going to sleep late,

Do not disgrace those who gave you birth."3

***Notes***

*1These officers had their 'positions' or places, and their pay. They had also their sacrifices, but such as were private or personal to themselves.*

*2not 'scholar,' a more modern meaning of shi. The shi of feudal China were the younger sons of the higher classes, and men that by their ability were rising out of the lower, and who were all in inferior situations and looking forward to offices of trust in the service of the royal court or of their several states. When the feudal system had passed away, the class of 'scholars' gradually took their place.*

VI Filial Piety in the Common People

"They follow the course of heaven (in the revolving seasons); they distinguish the advantages afforded by (different) soils; they are careful of their conduct and economical in their expenditure—in order to nourish their parents. This is the filial piety of the common people.

"Therefore from the Son of Heaven down to the common people, there never has been one whose filial piety was without its beginning and end on whom calamity did not come."①

***Notes***

*1This chapter is the end of what Zhu Xi regarded as the only portion of the Xiao that came directly from Confucius. The chapters that follow lack the sequence of the foregoing.*

VII Filial Piety in Relation to the Three Powers①

The disciple Zeng said, "Immense indeed is the greatness of filial piety!"

The Master replied,②"Yes, filial piety is the constant (method) of Heaven, the righteousness of Earth, and the practical duty of Man. Heaven and earth invariably pursue the course (that may be thus described), and the people take it as their pattern. (The ancient kings) imitated the brilliant luminaries of heaven and acted in accordance with the (varying) advantages afforded by earth, so that they were in accord with all under heaven, and in consequence their teachings, without being severe, were successful, and their government, without being rigorous, secured perfect order.

"The ancient kings, seeing how their teachings could transform the people, set before them therefore an example of the most extended love, and none of the people neglected their parents. They set forth to them (the nature of) virtue and righteousness, and the people roused themselves to the practice of them. They went before them with reverence and yielding courtesy, and the people had no contentions. They led them on by the rules of propriety and by music, and the people were harmonious and benignant. They showed them what they loved and what they disliked, and the people understood their prohibitions.

"It is said in the Book of Poetry:

Awe-inspiring are you, O Grand-Master Yin,

And the people all look up to you."3

***Notes***

*1i.e., Heaven, Earth, Man*

*2The first part of Confucius' reply is found in the Zuo Zhuan (Legge, vol. V, p. 708)*

VIII Filial Piety in Government

The Master said, "Anciently, when the intelligent kings by means of filial piety ruled all under heaven, they did not dare to receive with disrespect the ministers of small states. How much less would they do so to the dukes, marquises, counts, and barons! Thus it was that they got (the princes of) the myriad states with joyful hearts (to assist them) in the (sacrificial) services to their royal predecessors.

"The rulers of states did not dare to slight wifeless men and widows. How much less would they slight their officers and the people! Thus it was that they got all their people with joyful hearts (to assist them) in serving the rulers, their predecessors.

"The heads of clans did not dare to slight their servants and concubines. How much less would they slight their wives and sons! Thus it was that they got their men with joyful hearts (to assist them) in the service of their parents.

"In such a state of things, while alive, parents reposed in (the glory of) their sons, and, when sacrificed to, their disembodied spirits enjoyed their offerings. Therefore for all under heaven peace and harmony prevailed; disasters and calamities did not occur; misfortunes and rebellions did not arise.

"It is said in the Book of Poetry:

To an upright, virtuous conduct

All in the four quarters of the state render obedient homage."

*Notes*

*1Shi Jing, III, iii, ode 2, stanza 2, p. 511. Mao 256.*

IX The Government of the Sages①

The disciple Zeng said, "I venture to ask whether in the virtue of the sages there was not something greater than filial piety."

The Master replied, "Of all (creatures with their different) natures produced by Heaven and Earth, man is the noblest. Of all the actions of man there is none greater than filial piety. In

filial piety there is nothing greater than the reverential awe of one's father. In the reverential awe shown to one's father there is nothing greater than the making him the correlate of Heaven.② The duke of Zhou was the man who (first) did this.

"Formerly the duke of Zhou at the border altar sacrificed to Hou Ji as the correlate of Heaven, and in the Brilliant Hall he honored king Wen and sacrificed to him as the correlate of God. The consequence was that from (all the states) within the four seas, every (prince) came in the discharge of his duty to (assist in those) sacrifices. In the virtue of the sages what besides was there greater than filial piety?

"Now the feeling of affection grows up at the parents' knees, and as (the duty of) nourishing those parents is exercised, the affection daily merges in awe. The sages proceeded from the (feeling of) awe to teach (the duties of) reverence, and from (that of) affection to teach (those of) love. The teachings of the sages, without being severe, were successful, and their government, without being rigorous, was effective. What they proceeded from was the root (of filial piety implanted by Heaven).

"The relation and duties between father and son, (thus belonging to) the Heaven-conferred nature, (contain in them the principle of) righteousness between ruler and subject. The son derives his life from his parents, and no greater gift could possibly be transmitted. His ruler and parent (in one), his father deals with him accordingly, and no generosity could be greater than this. Hence, he who does not love his parents, but loves other men, is called a rebel against virtue, and he who does not revere his parents, but reveres other men, is called a rebel against propriety. When (the ruler) himself thus acts contrary to (the principles) which should place him in accord (with all men), he presents nothing for the people to imitate. He has nothing to do with what is good, but entirely and only with what is injurious to virtue. Though he may get (his will, and be above others), the superior man does not give him his approval.

"It is not so with the superior man. He speaks, having thought whether the words should be spoken; he acts, having thought whether his actions are sure to give pleasure. His virtue and righteousness are such as will be honored; what he initiates and does is fit to be imitated; his deportment is worthy of contemplation; his movements in advancing or retiring are all according to the proper rule. In this way does he present himself to the people, who both revere and love him, imitate and become like him. Thus he is able to make his teaching of virtue successful, and his government and orders to be carried into effect.③

"It is said in the Book of Poetry:

The virtuous man, the princely one,

Has nothing wrong in his deportment."

*Notes*

*1i.e., the sovereigns of antiquity*

*2pei tian. The phrase is used with reference to the virtue of a sovereign, making him as it were the mate of God, ruling on earth as God rules above, and with reference to the honors paid to a departed sovereign, when he is associated with God in the great sacrificial services. In the next paragraph, 'correlate of God' renders pei shang di. Legge has a long discussion of his rendering of the terms tian and shang di in his preface, pp. xxiii-xxix. In addition, in his note, Legge explains that "Heaven" and "God" have the same reference; the former expresses honor, the latter affection.*

*3This paragraph is a mosaic of passages from the Zuo Zhuan.*

*4Shi, I, xiv, ode 3, stanza 3, p. 223. Mao 152.*

X An Orderly Description of the Acts of Filial Piety

The Master said, "The service which a filial son does to his parents is as follows: In his general conduct to them, he manifests the utmost reverence. In his nourishing of them, his endeavor is to give them the utmost pleasure. When they are ill, he feels the greatest anxiety. In mourning for them (dead), he exhibits every demonstration of grief. In sacrificing to them, he displays the utmost solemnity. When a son is complete in these five things, (he may be pronounced) able to serve his parents.

"He who (thus) serves his parents, in a high situation will be free from pride, in a low situation will be free from insubordination, and among his equals will not be quarrelsome. In a high situation pride leads to ruin; in a low situation insubordination leads to punishment; among equals quarrelsomeness leads to the wielding of weapons. If those three things be not put away, though a son every day contribute beef, mutton, and pork to nourish his parents, he is not filial."①

***Notes***

*1Of. Analects 2.7.*

XI Filial Piety in Relation to the Five Punishments

The Master said, "There are three thousand offenses against which the five punishments are directed,① and there is not one of them greater than being unfilial.

"When constraint is put upon a ruler, that is the disowning of his superiority. When the authority of the sages is disallowed, that is the disowning of (all) law. When filial piety is put aside, that is the disowning of the principle of affection. These (three things) pave the way to anarchy."

***Notes***

*1Cf. Shu, Legge, vol. III, p. 44-45 and esp. p. 388-390.*

XII Amplification of "The All-embracing Rule of Conduct" in Chapter I

The Master said, "For teaching the people to be affectionate and loving, there is nothing better than filial piety. For teaching them (the observance of) propriety and submissiveness, there is nothing better than fraternal duty. For changing their manners and altering their customs, there is nothing better than music. For securing the repose of superiors and the good order of the people, there is nothing better than the rules of propriety.

"The rules of propriety are simply (the development of) the principle of reverence. Therefore the reverence paid to a father makes (all) sons pleased. The reverence paid to an elder brother makes (all) younger brothers pleased. The reverence paid to a ruler makes (all) subjects pleased. The reverence paid to the One man makes thousands and myriads of men pleased. The reverence is paid to a few, and the pleasure extends to many. This is what is meant by an 'All-embracing Rule of Conduct.'"

XIII Amplification of 'the Perfect Virtue' in Chapter I

The Master said, "The teaching of filial piety by the superior man① does not require that he should go to family after family and daily see the members of each. His teaching of filial piety is a tribute of reverence to all the fathers under heaven. His teaching of fraternal submission is a tribute of reverence to all the elder brothers under heaven. His teaching of the duty of a subject is a tribute of reverence to all the rulers under heaven.

"It is said in the Book of Poetry:

The happy and courteous sovereign

Is the parent of the people.②

"If it were not a perfect virtue, how could it be recognized as in accordance with their nature by the people so extensively as this?"

***Notes***

*1The jun zi here must be taken to mean the sovereign.*

*2Shi, III, ii, ode 7, stanza 1, p. 489. Mao 251.*

XIV Amplification of "Making our Name Famous" in Chapter I

The Master said, "The filial piety with which the superior man serves his parents may be transferred as loyalty to the ruler. The fraternal duty with which he serves his elder brother may be transferred as submissive deference to elders. His regulation of his family may be transferred as good government in any official position. Therefore, when his conduct is thus successful in his inner (private) circle, his name will be established (and transmitted) to future generations."

XV Filial Piety in Relation to Reproof and Remonstrance

The disciple Zeng said, "I have heard your instructions on the affection of love, on respect and reverence, on giving repose to (the minds of) our parents, and on making our names famous. I would venture to ask if (simple) obedience to the orders of one's father can be pronounced filial piety."

The Master replied, "What words are these! What words are these! Anciently, if the Son of Heaven had seven ministers who would remonstrate with him, although he had not right methods of government, he would not lose his possession of the kingdom. If the prince of a state had five such ministers, though his measures might be equally wrong, he would not lose his state. If a great officer had three, he would not, in a similar case, lose (the headship of) his clan. If an inferior officer had a friend who would remonstrate with him, a good name would not cease to be connected with his character. And the father who had a son that would remonstrate with him would not sink into the gulf of unrighteous deeds. Therefore when a case of unrighteous conduct is concerned, a son must by no means keep from remonstrating with his father, nor a minister from remonstrating with his ruler. Hence, since remonstrance is required in the case of unrighteous conduct, how can (simple) obedience to the orders of a father be accounted filial piety?"①

***Notes***

*1Of Analects 4.18 and Li Ji, X, i, 15.*

XVI The Influence of Filial Piety and the Response to It

The Master said, "Anciently, the intelligent kings served their fathers with filial piety, and therefore they served Heaven with intelligence. They served their mothers with filial piety, and therefore they served Earth with discrimination. They pursued the right course with reference to their (own) seniors and juniors, and therefore they secured the regulation of the relations between superiors and inferiors (throughout the kingdom). When Heaven and Earth were served with intelligence and discrimination, the spiritual intelligences displayed (their retributive power).①

"Therefore even the Son of Heaven must have some whom he honors; that is, he has his uncles of his surname. He must have some to whom he concedes the precedence; that is, he has his cousins, who bear the same surname and are older than himself. In the ancestral temple he manifests the utmost reverence, showing that he does not forget his parents. He cultivates his person and is careful of his conduct, fearing lest he should disgrace his predecessors. When in the ancestral temple he exhibits the utmost reverence, the spirits of the departed manifest themselves. Perfect filial piety and fraternal duty reach to (and move) the spiritual intelligences and diffuse their light on all within the four seas. They penetrate everywhere.

"It is said in the Book of Poetry:

From the west to the east,

From the south to the north,

There was not a thought but did him homage."

***Notes***

*1The "spiritual intelligences" here are Heaven and Earth conceived of as spiritual beings.*

*2Shi, III, i, ode 10, stanza 6, p. 463. Mao 244.*

XVII The Service of the Ruler

The Master said, "The superior man1 serves his ruler in such a way that, when at court in his presence, his thought is how to discharge his loyal duty to the utmost, and when he retires from it, his thought is how to amend his errors. He carries out with deference the measures springing from his excellent qualities and rectifies him (only) to save him from what are evil. Hence, as the superior and inferior, they are able to have an affection for each other.

"It is said in the Book of Poetry:

In my heart I love him,

And why should I not say so?

In the core of my heart I keep him,

And never will forget him."

***Notes***

*1Jun zi here can only be the good and intelligent officer in the royal domain or at a feudal court.*

*2Shi, II, viii, ode 4, stanza 4, p. 415. Mao 228.*

XVIII Filial Piety in Mourning for Parents

The Master said, "When a filial son is mourning for a parent, he wails, but not with a prolonged sobbing. In the movements of ceremony he pays no attention to his appearance. His words are without elegance of phrase. He cannot bear to wear fine clothes. When he hears music, he feels no delight. When he eats a delicacy, he is not conscious of its flavor. Such is the nature of grief and sorrow.

"After three days he may partake of food, for thus the people are taught that the living should not be injured on account of the dead, and that emaciation must not be carried to the extinction of life. Such is the rule of the sages. The period of mourning does not go beyond three years, to show the people that it must have an end.

"An inner and outer coffin are made; the grave-clothes also are put on, and the shroud; and (the body) is lifted (into the coffin). The sacrificial vessels, round and square, are (regularly) set forth, and (the sight of them) fills (the mourners) with (fresh) distress. The women beat their breasts, and the men stamp with their feet, wailing and weeping, while they sorrowfully escort the coffin to the grave. They consult the tortoise-shell to determine the grave and the ground about it, and there they lay the body in peace. They prepare the ancestral temple (to receive the tablet of the departed), and there they present offerings to the disembodied spirit. In spring and autumn they offer sacrifices, thinking of the deceased as the seasons come round.

"The services of love and reverence to parents when alive, and those of grief and sorrow to them when dead: these completely discharge the fundamental duty of living men. The righteous claims of life and death are all satisfied, and the filial son's service of his parents is completed."1

***Notes***

*1The above is the Classic of Filial Piety, as published by the emperor Xuan in A.D. 722, with the headings then prefixed to the eighteen chapters. Subsequently, in the eleventh century, Si Ma Guang (A.D. 1009-1086), a famous statesman and historian, published what he thought was the more ancient text of the classic in twenty-two chapters, with "Explanations" by himself, without chapter numbering or headings. The differences between his text and that of the Tang emperor are insignificant.*