

CLASSICAL CHINESE POETRY AND PROSE

THUS SPOKE THE MASTER

TRANSLATED BY XU YUANCHONG

许译中国经典诗文集
论语 | 许渊冲 译



远涉传播出版社 | 中华书局
China Intercontinental Press | Zhonghua Book Company

JECT FOR TRANSLATION AND PUBLICATION
OF CHINESE CULTURAL WORKS
中国文化著作翻译出版工程项目



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图书在版编目 (CIP.) 数据

论语: 汉英对照 / 许渊冲译. —北京: 五洲传播出版社,
2011.10 (许译中国经典诗文集)
ISBN 978-7-5085-2199-2

I. ①论… II. ①许… III. ①汉语-英语-对照读物 ②儒家
IV. ①H319.4: B

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2011)第199509号

策划编辑: 荆孝敏 郑 磊

责任编辑: 王 峰

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装帧设计: 北京正视文化艺术有限责任公司

论语

出版发行: 五洲传播出版社

地 址: 北京市海淀区北三环中路31号生产力大楼B座7层

邮 编: 100088

电 话: 010-82005927, 010-82007837

网 址: www.cicc.org.cn

开 本: 140mm × 210mm 1/32

印 张: 14.25

版 次: 2012年1月第1版第1次印刷

印 刷: 北京海纳百川印刷有限公司

书 号: ISBN 978-7-5085-2199-2

定 价: 108.00元

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Ancient Chinese classic poems are exquisite works of art. As far as 2,000 years ago, Chinese poets composed the beautiful work *Book of Poetry* and *Elegies of the South*. Later, they created more splendid Tang poetry and Song lyrics. Such classic works as *Thus Spoke the Master* and *Laws Divine and Human* were extremely significant in building and shaping the culture of the Chinese nation. These works are both a cultural bond linking the thoughts and affections of Chinese people and an important bridge for Chinese culture and the world.

Mr. Xu Yuanchong has been engaged in translation for 70 years. In December 2010, he won the Lifetime Achievement Award in Translation conferred by the Translators Association of China (TAC). He is honored as the only expert who translates Chinese poems into both English and French. After his excellent interpretation, many Chinese classic poems have been further refined into perfect English and French rhymes. This collection of Classical Chinese Poetry and Prose gathers his most representative English translations. It includes the classic works *Thus Spoke the Master*, *Laws Divine and Human* and dramas such as *Romance of the Western Bower*, *Dream in Peony Pavilion*, *Love in Long-life Hall* and *Peach Blooms Painted with Blood*. The largest part of the collection includes the translation of selected poems from different dynasties. The selection includes various types of poetry. The selected works start from the pre-Qin era to the Qing Dynasty, covering almost the entire history of classic poems in China. Reading these works is like tasting "living water from the source" of Chinese culture.

We hope this collection will help English readers "understand, enjoy and delight in" Chinese classic poems, share the intelligence of Confucius and Lao Tzu (the Older Master), share the gracefulness of Tang poems, Song lyrics and classic operas and songs and promote exchanges between Eastern and Western culture. We also sincerely invite precious suggestions from our readers.

出版前言

中国古代经典诗文是中国传统文化的奇葩。早在两千多年以前，中国诗人就写出了美丽的《诗经》和《楚辞》；以后，他们又创造了更加灿烂的唐诗和宋词。《论语》《老子》这样的经典著作，则在塑造、构成中华民族文化精神方面具有极其重要的意义。这些作品既是联接所有中国人思想、情感的文化纽带，也是中国文化走向世界的重要桥梁。

许渊冲先生从事翻译工作70年，2010年12月荣获“中国翻译文化终身成就奖”。他被称为将中国诗词译成英法韵文的唯一专家，经他的妙手，许多中国经典诗文被译成出色的英文和法文韵语。这套“许译中国经典诗文集”荟萃许先生最具代表性的英文译作，既包括《论语》《老子》这样的经典著作，又包括《西厢记》《牡丹亭》《长生殿》《桃花扇》等戏曲剧本，数量最多的则是历代诗歌选集。这些诗歌选集包括诗、词、散曲等多种体裁，所选作品上起先秦，下至清代，几乎涵盖了中国古典诗歌的整个历史。阅读和了解这些作品，即可尽览中国文化的“源头活水”。

我们希望这套许氏译本能使英语读者对中国经典诗文也“知之，好之，乐之”，能够分享孔子、老子的智慧，分享唐诗、宋词、中国古典戏曲的优美，并以此促进东西文化的交流。也敬请读者朋友提出宝贵意见。

2011年10月



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CONTENTS

目 录

Preface.....	1	序.....	145
Chapter I.....	8	学而篇第一.....	150
Chapter II.....	13	为政篇第二.....	163
Chapter III.....	19	八佾篇第三.....	180
Chapter IV.....	26	里仁篇第四.....	196
Chapter V.....	31	公冶长篇第五.....	207
Chapter VI.....	38	雍也篇第六.....	224
Chapter VII.....	45	述而篇第七.....	241
Chapter VIII.....	52	泰伯篇第八.....	259
Chapter IX.....	57	子罕篇第九.....	270
Chapter X.....	64	乡党篇第十.....	285
Chapter XI.....	70	先进篇第十一.....	300
Chapter XII.....	78	颜渊篇第十二.....	317
Chapter XIII.....	86	子路篇第十三.....	330
Chapter XIV.....	94	宪问篇第十四.....	346

Chapter XV.....	104	卫灵公篇第十五.....	368
Chapter XVI.....	112	季氏篇第十六.....	384
Chapter XVII.....	119	阳货篇第十七.....	394
Chapter XVIII.....	126	微子篇第十八.....	409
Chapter XIX.....	131	子张篇第十九.....	418
Chapter XX.....	138	尧曰篇第二十.....	429

PREFACE

Confucius (551—479 BC) is the most influential sage in China. This book is a record of the dialogues between the sage and his disciples. In answering their questions, he does not tell them what the answer is, but how he would solve the question, so his answer has an everlasting transcendental value. He teaches his disciples how to cultivate the mind and thinks it a delight to acquire knowledge and to behave in accordance with what is right. In this book politics, ethics and religion are combined into one, but he replaces religion by aesthetics or the sense of delight, which becomes the essence of life. His way of thinking might not be logical, deductive or inductive but intuitive, associative and analogical. He has exercised great influence on forming and molding national character and social behavior, and given guidance to public and private life.

Seventy-five Nobel Prize winners who gathered together at Paris in 1988 made a statement to the effect that mankind should seek wisdom from Confucius if they wished to live

a peaceful and happy life in the 21st century. What is the wisdom of Confucius? It consists in the maxim saying, “Do not do to others what you would not have others do to you.” There is a similar maxim in the *Bible*, saying, “Do to others what you would have others do to you” or “Do as you would be done by.” What is the difference between these two maxims? The Biblical maxim is positive, while the Confucian is negative. For instance, in the Middle Ages, religious wars between the Catholics and the Protestants lasted for long, long years, because the Catholics believed in Catholicism and the Protestants in Protestantism, the former called the latter pagans and would put some of them to death. Here we see the influence of this Biblical maxim. As the Catholics believed in Catholicism and would have the Protestants believe in Catholicism too, so war broke out. On the other hand, in ancient China Confucianism co-existed with Buddhism and Taoism peacefully for thousands of years, because Chinese emperors would not convert Buddhists nor Taoists into Confucians, so no religious war ever broke out in China. Here we see the influence of this Confucian maxim and the wisdom of Confucius.

Confucius was a great master in ancient China. He taught his disciples to be good men. What was a good man?

It is said in this book that a good man should cultivate and develop five qualities, that is, reverence, lenience, confidence, diligence and benevolence. What do they mean? It is meant by reverence that a man should respect others as himself; by lenience one should understand and tolerate others; by confidence one should believe in others and be trustworthy; by diligence one should be devoted to others heart and soul; and by benevolence one should do good to others. In a word, a good man should do to others what he would do to himself and would not force others to do what they will not.

Confucius also taught his disciples ritual and music. Ritual would bring order and music would afford delight; ritual imitated the order of the universe and music the harmony of nature. It would be interesting to compare Confucius with Plato in their teachings. Plato said in his *Republic* that every young man should receive physical and musical education. Here we see both Confucius and Plato thought it necessary to be educated in music, but Confucius lay emphasis on ritual service and Plato on physical education. If music could make man wise, then ritual would make men good and keep society in order, and physical education would make men strong and brave. Here we see the difference between the two sages: one emphasized ritual and order and the other strength and bravery.

Plato's philosophy reflects the views of Homer's epics *Iliad* and *Odyssey*: the one extols the strength and bravery of Achilles and Hector, while the other extols the intellect and wisdom of Ulysses. Hector's heroism is typically illustrated by the following verse:

Where heroes war, the foremost place I claim.

The first in danger as the first in fame.

But Confucius did not approve the bravery of his disciples. For instance, when Zi Lu said, "If I were entrusted with a state of a thousand war chariots, though situated among big powers and invaded by hostile armies, I would teach its people to be courageous by the end of three years." Confucius laughed at him to show his disapproval of his rash courage.

The disciple whom Confucius appreciated most was Yan Hui who was so wise as to be able to infer ten things from one, so eager to learn as not to commit the same mistake again, and so contented as not to complain of the humble life with only a handful of rice to eat and a gourdful of water to drink. How could he be happy in poverty? As said in the beginning of this book, it is a delight to acquire knowledge and put it into practice. Yan Hui is an example to show delight in learning could make a man forget hunger and

neglect sorrow and not perceive the coming of old age. Thus we may say the basic feeling in Confucian philosophy is delight. As said in this book, it is good to know truth, better to love it and best to delight in it. Here we can see wisdom in the sense of delight. How can delight yield wisdom? Confucius said, "A man may be inspired by poetry, established by rites and perfected by music." So we may say poetry, rites and music would combine to make a man wise. And Confucius said, "The wise are free from doubt, the good from worry and the brave from fear." He approved the wise and the good, but not the strong and the brave, with the result that wise good men are more highly honored in China than brave strong men.

In the West, it is said in the Bible that God created Adam and Eve, but drove them out of the Garden of Eden because they had eaten of the forbidden fruit of Wisdom, that is to say, God did not approve man and woman to be wise, and man and woman had a sense of sin for they had done what God forbade them to do. Plato also said in his *Republic* that poets should be driven out of the Republic, this shows that the Greek philosopher did not approve wise poets either. When religion and philosophy joined hands to banish the wise, wisdom fell into the hands of the clergymen.

THUS SPOKE THE MASTER

If the clergymen believed in one sect of religion, they would deem it a sin to be a pagan and would burn him alive for he had sinned against God. When wisdom yielded its place to strength and violence, war broke out, followed by the dark ages. What is more, religious wars turned into Crusades against another religion. It was not until the Renaissance that the West, awakened from the sense of sin, began to enjoy the forbidden fruit of wisdom and rebuild Western countries into big powers.

In the East, the Han emperors worshipped Confucius and Confucian philosophy almost became national religion. As Confucius preached against monstrosities, violence, disorder and divinities, there was no religious war in Chinese history, and China became the most civilized country in the world from the first century down to 1820 when China's GDP was the highest (30%) in the world. If the preaching of Confucius could be put into practice in the West as in the East, then the world would become more civilized and peaceful. If all the world preached and practised against violence and disorder, then even the conflicting sides in the world could be reconciled. That is the reason, I think, why the seventy-five Nobel Prize winners would seek wisdom from Confucius to put the world in good order.

On the other hand, Confucius had his weakness. As a result of his disapproval of strong men and brave men, heroes were not so highly honored as sages in China and the country weakened for lack of strong and brave men. That is one of the reasons why the country was often invaded by barbarian tribes from within and without and became a semi-colony during the first half of the 20th century. In order to become strong, China should honor heroism as the West does. Confucianism should be modernized to make the people wise, good and brave, then mankind would live a happy, peaceful life in the 21st century.

Superior and alone, Confucius stood,

Who taught that useful science, to be good. —A. Pope

Xu Yuanchong

April 10, 2005

CHAPTER I





- 1.1. Is it not a delight, said the Master, to acquire knowledge and put it into practice? Is it not a pleasure to meet friends coming from afar? Is he not an intelligent man, who is careless alike of being known or unknown?
- 1.2. Few who respect their parents and their elders, said Master You, would do anything against their superiors. None who do nothing against their superiors would rise in revolt. An intelligent man should be fundamentally good. A fundamentally good man will behave in the right way. Respect for one's parents and elder brothers is the fundamental quality for a good man.
- 1.3. A good man, said the Master, would rarely say what he does not believe, or pretend to appear better than he is.
- 1.4. I ask myself, said Master Zeng, three questions everyday. In dealing with others, have I not thought of their interests? In making friends, have my deeds not agreed with my words? In teaching students, have I not put into practice what I teach them?