

外教社中国文化汉外对照丛书

上海外语教育出版社



英译

三字經·千字文

THE THIRWORD PRIMER & THE KILOWORD

【三字經】

◎ 宋·王应麟

原著

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译注

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译注

THE THIRWORD PRIMER

Written by Wang Yinglin (1223-1296)

Rendered into English by Wang Baotong & Li Li

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Foreword

San Zi Jing (*The Triword Primer*) and *Qian Zi Wen* (*The Kiloword*) are unique wonders in Chinese literature. With 1572 words, the former gives a panoramic view of the ethic codes, Confucian canons, Chinese history, exemplary Confucian behavior, and the way of learning, while with 1000 words, the latter lists 954 different Chinese characters in resounding four-syllabic rhymed verse. By learning these 2572 words by heart, the school-children will be able to be acquainted with the fundamentals of Chinese civilization and the core of the Chinese vocabulary, thus obtaining their first lesson in literacy.

Since the earliest translation of *Qian Zi Wen* into English by Samuel Kidd in 1830, there have been various English renderings of these two Chinese classics. These translations are mostly done in prosaic English without much literary merits or with much misunderstanding. A case in point is Herbert Giles' translation, "Men at their birth, are naturally good. Their natures are much the same; their habits become widely different." A nonsensical translation can be found on the Internet, "At the beginning of life, sex is good. Basically, sex is nearly all the same in nature. But it depends on how the way you do it."

I am so pleased to read Professor Wang Baotong's creative rhymed translation of these two classics. The titles themselves are worth admiration. He coined two new words in the titles – *triword* and *kiloword*—which I am sure will enter the English lexicon. The first lines of *San Zi Jing* fully illustrate the success of his translation,

“人之初，	At first mankind
性本善。	Is kind at heart,
性相近，	With natures alike

习相远。

But habits apart.”

His pithy lines, *xaya* and *aabb* rhyme schemes, and annotations to the culture-loaded terms well fit the style of these popular Chinese classics. I do admire his painstaking efforts in doing the nearly impossible. Professor Wang Baotong has published widely in the studies of English poetry and the translation of Chinese poetry (e.g. Wang Wei's poems). With his intelligence and diligence, he has made another contribution in bringing the two gems of Chinese literature to the West. I sincerely hope that I shall be able to enjoy more of his fruits in the future.

Wang Rongpei

Foreword

Professor Wang Baotong was my student when he was very young, and has been my colleague since he graduated from studenthood. As he has a nice, clear pronunciation, he, too, was assigned to teaching oral English. He discovered from BBC that *Mother Goose Rhymes* could teach pronunciation and intonation very well, and since he has a fine singing voice, he went on to ballads. We used to sing “*No. John, No*” together. Twenty years later, Henan University Foreign Languages Department started a Master’s Degree program, with three teachers for well over a dozen courses. We set our early graduates with many years’ teaching experience to preparing specialized graduate courses; undergraduates could profit from the spinoff. I ordered Wang Baotong to become a professor of poetry. Which he did.

Thanks to his early attraction to nursery rhymes, Prof. Wang has a special affection for rhymed, metric verse. Perhaps it was this that gave him the mad idea that an ancient thousand-character rhymed tetrasyllabic Chinese teaching exercise, in which no character appeared twice, could be transposed into English. The present book, in rhymed couplets (which M. H. Abrams calls the most demanding of poetic forms) is the result. The couplets must not only rhyme sufficiently well; the two lines must be formally equivalent. Prof. Wang gave me large sections of his translation for suggestions. It was irresistible, more fun than a crossword puzzle or a jigsaw. However well Prof. Wang has achieved his aim, and I think he has done very well, readers are tempted to try their own skill, jiggling vocabulary here and joggling grammar there, hoping to achieve a smoother line or happier translation. But only Prof. Wang Baotong has patiently, couplet by couplet, transmogrified the whole thousand characters

and, by robbing the family which spawned kilogram, kilometre, kilowatt, created an appropriate title, "*Kiloword*". And if you disapprove of neologisms, you are in good company; Ben Jonson scolded Will S. for them.

So good luck, Wang Baotong. When I get my copy, I am going to take a pencil and start having fun with your kilopuzzle.

Shirley Wood

East Brunswick, New Jersey

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三字经*

The Triword Primer

宋 · 王应麟

By Wang Yinglin (1223–1296)



* 王应麟原著关于中国历史部分止于宋，第255句（“辽与金”）至第286句（“民国兴”），乃参考了民国版的《三字经》。Wang's Original Version on China's history stopped at the Song, his own time. The added lines on the latter periods (ll. 255–286) come from the anonymous Chinese Republic version.

rén zhī chū
人之初，
xìng běn shàn
性本善。
xìng xiāng jìn
性相近，
xí xiāng yuǎn
习相远。

At first mankind
Is kind at heart,
With natures alike
But habits apart.



gǒu bú jiào
苟不教，
xìng nǎi qiān
性乃迁。
jiào zhī dào
教之道，
guì yǐ zhuān
贵以专。

The untaught child
Will go astray.
It's best to keep him
Along the right way.



xī mèng mǔ
昔孟母，
zé lín chù
择邻处。
zǐ bù xué
子不学，
duàn jī zhù
断机杼。

Mencius' mother*
Chose his neighbour,
And seeing him lax,
She stopped her labour.*



* It is said that the widowed mother of Mencius (孟子 372-289 BC) tried her best to put him to a place suitable for his education. Three times she moved her home until she finally chose her house near a school.

* Legend has it that when Mencius's mother saw her son tired of school, she angrily broke her loom in the middle of her weaving to warn him not to stop halfway.



dòu yān shān
窦燕山，
yǒu yì fāng
有义方。
jiāo wǔ zǐ
教五子，
míng jù yáng
名俱扬。

Mr. Dou Yanshan, who
Turned from shame,
Begot five sons,
Each rose to fame.*

* Referring to Dou Yanshan of Youzhou (幽州 around the present Beijing), an evil-doer remaining sonless at the age of 30. He had a dream one day, in which his deceased father told him to mend his way through beneficence, which would "lead to good luck". He kept this dream in mind and began helping the poor and doing good to others. As a result, he begot five sons who all won in the imperial examinations and were given high positions.



yǎng bú jiào
养不教,
fù zhī guò
父之过。
jiāo bù yán
教不严,
shī zhī duò
师之惰。

A child untaught

Is father's fault.

Where teaching's slack,

The teacher's done naught.



zǐ bù xué
子不学，
fēi suǒ yí
非所宜。
yòu bù xué
幼不学，
lǎo hé wéi
老何为。

When weary of studies,
The kids are to rue:
When they are old,
What can they do?



yù bù zhuó
玉不琢，

bù chéng qì
不成器。

rén bù xué
人不学，

bù zhī yì
不知义。

Unless being carved
The jade is nothing more.

Unless well taught,
Your mind is raw.



wéi rén zǐ
为人子，
fāng shǎo shí
方少时。
qīn shī yǒu
亲师友，
xí lǐ yí
习礼仪。

The son from young
Must learn to endear
His teachers and friends,
And to rites adhere.

