

A synthesis of educational chanted rules

The chapter *Xuntong men* 訓童門 in *riyong leishu* 日用類書

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Among the many chapters on all human knowledge provided by the 1612 encyclopedia entitled *Xin ban zengbu tianxia bian yong wenlin miao jin wanbao quanshu* 新板增補天下便用文林妙錦萬寶全書 (The marvelous, precious, newly edited and supplemented “Complete Book of Myriad Treasures” of literati for the convenient use of all), there is also one on infant education. In the introduction of the chapter, the author stresses the importance of education, and how it can transform a person’s life. Therefore, what were the recommended teaching strategies for raising virtuous children? What was the common etiquette for a child to follow in seventeenth-century China? What analogy or difference does it have in comparison to previous pedagogical literature?

This paper, by means of the partial English translation of the encyclopedic chapter *Xuntong men* 訓童門 (section for educating children), tries to answer these questions by analyzing the educational precepts, their roots anchored in the Chinese pedagogical literature and the use of rhymes such as *erge* 兒歌, *geyao* 歌謠, as an effective teaching strategy to make the precepts simpler and catchy.

The selected case study represents a model example of printed text which belongs to the genre *riyong leishu* 日用類書 (a collection of texts for daily-use), encyclopedias that circulated widely in late Ming and early Qing China, and reflects what was then the most widespread and common knowledge in the pedagogical field recommended for self-study. The chapter which is focused on teaching children also represents the fusion of Confucian educational concepts and the practical nature characteristic of daily-use encyclopedias.

Key words: Ming literature; *riyong leishu*; children education; Chinese encyclopedia.

1. An overview of the education system between the Late Ming and Early Qing dynasties (15th and 18th centuries)

In premodern China, childhood was semantically often associated with the concept of *Meng* 蒙, meaning ‘ignorance’, as seen in the terms such as *tongmeng* 童蒙, child ignorance, or *mengxue* 蒙學, elementary learning. *Meng* 蒙, which appears as the fourth hexagram in the text *Yijing* 易經 (see Zhu

2016) “the Scripture of Change,” consists of the trigram *gen* 艮 (mountain) above *kan* 坎 (water). This configuration, as explained in the text, suggests:

Below the mountain lies danger, a place of dimness. Inner danger and outer stability are concepts associated with being “dim, ignorant” (...) Below the mountain emerges a spring: Dim. The superior person nurtures his virtue by improving his behavior (Zhu Xi 2019: 80).

Interpreted in relation to children, *Meng* indicates the enormous potential of this blank canvas stage (*Meng heng* 蒙亨 “*Meng*, there will be progress and success”), but also its dimness and potential for harm if not properly guided. Youth is portrayed as a fertile phase in which talents can be cultivated, shaping the *meng*, this state of knowing nothing, through *jiaoyu* 教育, education.

During the Ming dynasty, various types of *tongmeng jiaocai* 童蒙教材 (didactic materials for children) were produced, drawing inspiration from the rich tradition of pedagogical studies of previous eras, particularly during the Song dynasty (960–1279). This period saw a significant production of works aimed at selecting the primary requirements in children’s education, such as the text *Tongmeng xuzhi* 童蒙須知 (What Every Child Should Know) written by Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130-1200) (Falato 2020: 23-45). The importance of education as a tool for personal development was often stressed not only by Confucian tradition but also by Taoist and Buddhist circles (Lee 2000:4).

The decision made by the founding Emperor Hongwu (洪武, 1328–1398) to initiate a process of reculturalization, *jiaohua* 教化 (Schneewind 2006:2), or indoctrination of the masses through education marked the beginning of the Ming dynasty. This led to the widespread establishment of schools at all levels. In premodern China, the state led primary education by establishing dynastic schools (*guanxue* 官學) aimed at imperial clan descendants, with a curriculum focused on preparing for imperial examinations. The Confucian elite, defined by kinship relations, could attend clan or family schools (*jiashu* 家塾), while wealthy families preferred to hire private tutors for their children’s education (private teaching, *sixue* 私學).

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, rural indoctrination was greatly promoted, expanding elementary education in rural communities with the primary aim of disseminating basic moral and social educational content, as not all students would proceed to further their studies and access the imperial examinations (Leung 1994). Education reached a broader and more diverse student population through private academies (*shuyuan* 書院), community schools (*shexue* 社學, also *shuxue* 塾學, *xiangxue* 鄉學), and charitable schools (*yixue* 義學 or *yishu* 義塾).

Private academies primarily depended on renowned scholars and their teaching methods (Cong 2011: 20), with support from the rulers contingent upon whether the teacher supported the rulers' policies. Community schools, also known as village schools, were established throughout every prefecture, township, and county with the founding of the Ming dynasty. However, these schools lacked a fixed format and did not receive consistent state support. Although some community schools served as preparatory institutions for the imperial examinations, their main purpose was to teach basic Confucian orthodoxy, making them the most common type of primary education (Lidén 2022).

Charitable schools were institutions supported not by public funds but by private donations from the local gentry. These schools were intended for poor families who lacked the financial resources to educate their children or for children belonging to clans. Charitable schools primarily focused on teaching basic literacy, although in some cases, they also offered advanced studies.

Education was directly proportional to the Ming dynasty's economic and cultural development. The commercial boom generated by the growth of agricultural development and commercial infrastructure, which began during the Song and Yuan (1271–1368) eras, led to the formation of large metropolises in the Lower Yangzi 扬子江 area. This, in turn, fostered the emergence of a powerful bureaucratic-mercantile elite. Consequently, the regions of Jiangsu 江苏, Zhejiang 浙江, Jiangnan 江南, and Jiangxi 江西 were particularly well-served by schools.

2. Primers for children and *riyong leishu*

During the Ming dynasty, child education primarily focused on a set of basic primers, typically the *Sanzi Jing* (三字經, Three-Character Classic), *Baijia Xing* (百家姓, Myriad Family Names), and *Qianzi Wen* (千字文, Thousand-Character Essay). These three books, often summarized as *San/Bai/Qian*, were studied during the initial years of schooling and served as preparation for reading the core texts of Confucian thought, the *Sishu Wujing* (四書五經, Four Books and Five Classics).

With the restoration of the imperial examination system and the widespread dissemination of Neo-Confucianism in civil society, Confucian texts, along with their commentaries, became integral to children's education (Brokaw 2007: 322). Among these commentaries, those produced by the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi's¹ school of thought (the Cheng-Zhu tradition) gained popularity from the 14th

¹ The thinkers Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107) and his older brother Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085) together with Zhu Xi were among the main philosophers behind the Neo Confucianism interpretations. For further information on the spread of Neo Confucianism and the connection with Buddhism, see Makeham (2018).

century onwards. By the early 15th century, these commentaries formed the foundation of comprehensive manuals (*da quan* 大全), such as the *Wujing Sishu Daquan* 五經四書大全 (great collection of the Five Classics and the Four Books), which were essential for preparing for the imperial examination program (Lippiello 2009).

However, due to the rise in interest in education and the increased accessibility to learning facilitated by the proliferation of schools (Yue 2013: 292-293), written knowledge began to spread creating a new increased group of “literate commoners” —“common people with reading ability lower than the elite” (Wang 2021: 595), which includes people who had the opportunity to receive an elementary education in private and institutional schools but did not continue with further education curriculum. Consequently, traditional educational materials evolved to meet the needs of these new “literate commoners,” necessitating comprehensive manuals that were simpler, more concise, and more economical (Brokaw 2007: 323).

By the mid-sixteenth century, as extensively analyzed by Elman and Brokaw’s studies, woodblock printing reached its zenith, which allowed for a response to the burgeoning demand for educational texts. Particularly in the southern coastal region of the Yangzi Delta, a significant increase in publishers and bookstores established this area as the epicenter of commercial publishing (Elman and Chao-Hui 2017: 138; Elman 2016: 16-18). In addition to the traditional “private” production of texts for government offices, religious organizations, and technical books for official examinations, there emerged a flourishing commercial production aimed at the new literate gentry. This led to the widespread distribution of so-called daily-use encyclopedias, or *riyong leishu* (日用類書),² a genre of texts that originated in the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279) and thrived during the middle and late Ming Dynasty.³

As *leishu* (collections of writings organized by categories),⁴ these books were designed to compile and systematize previously established texts. The addition of the *riyong* (daily-use) aspect involved updating these texts to reflect the evolving social environment. Consequently, *riyong leishu* provided

² The term *riyong leishu* was first introduced in the 1950s by Japanese scholar Sakai Tadao (Sakai 1958), gaining acceptance among scholars and still widely used today, translated into English as ‘daily use encyclopedia’ or ‘household encyclopedia’. For more on this topic, see Elman (2020), Brokaw (2007, 2017), and Rusk (2021).

³ *Leishu* were already increasingly attentive to the everyday world in the Song era; for example, the encyclopedic work *Shilin Guangji* 事林廣記 compiled by the Southern Song Confucian Chen Yuanjing 陳元靚 (12th-13th century) in the early Yuan Dynasty demonstrates a shift in the production of the *leishu* genre: the encyclopedia was not commissioned by the imperial court and included illustrations within the text.

⁴ For general information on the genre of *leishu*, see Wilkinson (2000: 600-610).

summaries of practical knowledge required for daily life, including topics such as medicine, geography, calligraphy, and social customs. These comprehensive manuals aimed to equip readers with general skills across various fields, as highlighted in their appealing titles designed to attract customers. They were intended for a broad audience, including *tianxia zhiren* (天下之人, all the people under heaven), *simin* (四民, the four social classes: *shi* 士 scholars, *nong* 農 peasants, *gong* 工 artisans, *shang* 商 merchants), and, more broadly, *yufu yufu* (愚夫愚婦, ignorant men and women) (Brokaw 2007a: 269). Additionally, *riyong leishu* often included a chapter titled *Xuntong Men* (訓童門), dedicated to the education of children.

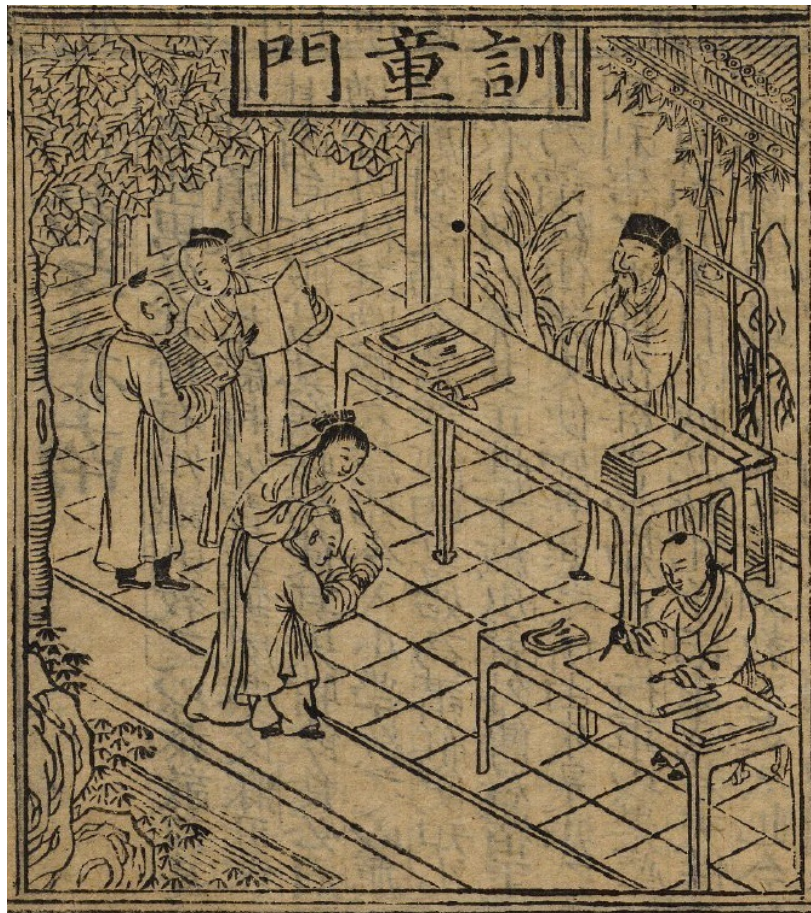


Fig. 1 *Xuntong Men* (訓童門), Section Dedicated to Teaching Children: Chapter Opening Illustration.

From *Xin ban zengbu tianxia bian yong wenlin miaojin wanbao quanshu* 新板增補天下便用文林妙錦萬寶全書. Harvard-Yenching Library Rare Book T 9299 7224. Public domain, from the Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University. Available at <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl:2093485>.

Xuntong Men draws inspiration from “Enlightenment books” (*mengshu* 蒙書) to educate children, incorporating pedagogical sources from the Song Dynasty such as Zhu Xi’s *Tongmeng Xuzhi* with new methods for presenting Confucian ethical precepts to align with contemporary societal needs. The chapter under analysis features what the text itself refers to as *kouhao ge* (口號歌). These are rhyming texts, “songs” without musical accompaniment, that aid memory, making the content more digestible and accessible to a broader audience, including young readers.

Zhao Jingshen’s studies highlight the ancient tradition of using rhymes in children’s education,⁵ exemplified by nursery rhymes known as *tongyao* (童謠). However, this literature for children did not receive significant attention until the 20th century (Pellatt 2015). Pellatt’s review of studies on children’s rhymes indicates that Lin Wuhui views *tongyao* and children’s songs (*erge* 兒歌) as different terms for indicating the same type of rhythmic composition for children, though this view is not universally accepted (Pellatt 2015). There is some overlap among *tongyao*, *erge*, and children’s poetry (*tongshi* 童詩). He Sanben prefers to use the term *geyao* (歌謠), a term found in the *Huainanzi*, to encompass all three subgenres and emphasize their ancient origins (He 2003). According to Gao Guofan, the roots of *tongyao* lie in the folk songs (*gudai minge* 古代民歌) that originated among ordinary people and can be traced back to *The Book of Changes* (*Zhou Yi* 周易) (Gao 1995: 197). During the Song and Yuan Dynasties, poetry was a common feature in vernacular books, often supplementing the text with part in lyrics for clarity and occasionally combined with illustrations and prose for educational purposes (Liu 2007).

The following chapter of this paper provides the English translation of the section *Xuntong men* from the 1612 daily-use encyclopaedia *Xin ban zengbu tianxia bian yong wenlin miao jin Wanbao quanshu* 新板增補天下便用文林妙錦萬寶全書 (“The Marvelous, Precious, Newly Edited and Supplemented *Wanbao Quanshu*: Complete Book of Myriad Treasures of Literati for the Convenient Use of All”), which is housed in the Harvard-Yenching Library.⁶

As indicated in the title, this book is a reissue of the *Wanbao Quanshu*, a well-known encyclopaedia for everyday use published during the Ming era, with several reprints and editions in circulation. The

⁵ The study of rhyming compositions was also part of childhood education. Since the Song and Yuan dynasties, poetry primers on *yundui* 韻對 (rhyme and paired phrasing) used to teach the composition of lyrical couplets were frequently employed (Zhang and Chen 2014: 186).

⁶ T9299/7224, repository Harvard College Library, Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University. The encyclopaedia is composed of 38 juan in total. The text is available at the link: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl:2093485>.

title's description as “marvelous, precious, newly edited and supplemented” reflects the typical advertising strategies employed by Ming publishers to persuade readers to purchase their edition over others available on the market.⁷ In the specific section analysed here, the supplement added in this book includes the use of songs in verses that accompany common educational notions for children.

The translated chapter begins with an introduction that lacks rhyme and a fixed sentence structure. This is followed by eight educational teachings (*Xun meng ba gui* 訓蒙八規), each introduced by a prose explanation (partly sourced from earlier texts) and followed by songs *ge* (歌). The structure of the twelve songs is consistent, with almost all comprising eight lines of seven characters each (*qizi gejue* 七字歌訣). The metrical pattern typically excludes end sounds in the third and sixth lines, although this is not always adhered to.⁸ The overall result of this chapter, which alternates parts in prose with more elaborated sections in rhyme, is a very simple, catchy, and easy-to-memorise text that could impart effectively basic education to children.⁹ The translation here proposed, however, focuses on conveying the meaning of the text rather than preserving the original rhyme and rhythm. In the following transliteration of the text, punctuation has been added, which is absent in the original, for a smoother reading experience and to indicate the interpretation made of the content. Where simplified characters appear in the document, it is because they are written in the original source and thus are faithfully reproduced. Some characters appear to be incorrect or are variants of more common forms, so a possible interpretation is provided in parentheses. Citations from other works, or phrases that appear similarly in other sources, are indicated in notes.

⁷ For other techniques used by daily-use encyclopaedias to encourage the purchase of reprints by emphasising the uniqueness of a particular edition, see Rusk 2021: 287-289.

⁸ For instance, in the first song, “Song of Serving Parents” (事親歌), the end rhymes are as follows: line 1 *tiān* 天, line 2 *quán* 全, line 3 *fǒu* 否, line 4 *mián* 眠, line 5 *juàn* 眷, line 6 *biān* 邊, line 7 *nù* 怒, line 8 *yán* 言. Lines 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 8 end with the sound *-an*. In contrast, the final song “Song of Instructions on Walking” (訓行歌) deviates from this pattern. Here, the end rhymes are as follows: line 1 匆 *cōng*, line 2 同 *tóng*, line 3 重 *zhòng*, line 4 容 *róng*, line 5 揖 *yī*, line 6 從 *cóng*, line 7 舜 *shùn*, line 8 中 *zhōng*. Lines 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 8 end with the sound *-ong*.

⁹ The text also employs quotations familiar to the reader and uses forms of parallelism that aid memorization. These aspects, along with a more detailed metric analysis, will not be addressed in this paper but will be covered in future work with a more in-depth analysis.

3. An example of Ming daily-use encyclopedic guide to child education

訓童門：教子指南

古者生男，俟其稍有知識則教之以恭敬、尊長，禁其頑暴。六七歲時始習書寫，夙興夜寐¹⁰，毋容其惰怠，衣服量其寒暖，¹¹勿使其失時，飲食必須樽節，毋使其過度。¹²八歲始令入小學，教之以灑掃應對之節，令讀《孝經》、《四書》，始為講解，使知禮義。收其放心、養其正性。十歲出就外傳，居宿于外。乃讀經傳諸史，使知善惡之所由來、是非之別、利害之端。博視群書，當知古今行事以崇。學業日積月深，自然成就。故孔子曰：“少成若天性，習慣如自然”。¹³此乃聖人之遺訓，教人之法也。今人少諳此理，習於常情。

始有其子，頗有聰明之資，便謂其必自能，遂荒其業。亦有見其子之資質魯鈍，謂其終不能成，遂廢其學。或者恃其富貴，倚其世祿，乃驕其子孫，以致墮(墮)遊失業，習於下流。於此之類，是不愛其子，忝辱祖宗。¹⁴是故養子不可以不學，而教之不可以不嚴也。學之篤，教之嚴，未有不成就者也。先儒有言，“學，則庶人之子為公卿。不學，則公卿之子為庶人”。¹⁵可不慎哉？故區不揣淺鄙之言為陋，特於此訓童之門，知務君子，當鑒而行之是幸。

Section dedicated to teaching children: Guide to child education

In the past, male offspring, as soon as they were old enough to understand things, were taught to be respectful of superiors and elders, as well as to suppress stubborn and violent behavior. At the age of six or seven, they were taught to write, to be hardworking, and to avoid laziness. They were taught to dress appropriately according to the season and to eat without wasting food or overeating. At the age

¹⁰ “夙興夜寐” this expression comes from the *Book of Poetry (Shijing, 詩經)*, Book of Poetry, Odes of Wei, Mang.5.1.

¹¹ A similar sentence can be found in *Zunsheng Bajian 遵生八箋 (Eight Discourses on Respecting Life)*, written by Gao Lian 高濂 (ca. 1527–1603) and published in 1591. The text obtained wide circulation. See the part *Gaozi yiyang licheng 高子怡養立成*, eight *juan*: 高子曰...時自酌量身服，寒暖即為加減，毋得忍寒不就增服” (Gao Lian 1988: 216-17). Manuals on self-cultivation to obtain health preservation were common in the Ming dynasty, see Chen 2008.

¹² These sentences, which are the same in *Zunsheng Bajian*, are also collected in the 18th century encyclopedia *Siku Quanshu 欽定四庫全書*. “時 / 不時” can also be related to the Confucian concept of timely/untimely, suitable or unsuitable.

¹³ “少成若天性，習慣如自然” from *Han shu*, (ch. 48 *Jia Yi zhuan 賈誼傳*). In Chinese Text Project, ed. Donald Sturgeon. <https://ctext.org/han-shu/jia-yi-zhuan>.

¹⁴ This introductory passage on the different educational steps according to age and the different types of educational errors is also present in the encyclopedic work *Shilin Guangji 事林廣記*, in the beginning of the section *You xue xuzhi 幼學須知* (Instructions on children education).

¹⁵ From *Quanxue wen 勸學文 (To Encourage Studying)* written by the Song writer Liu Yong 柳永.

of eight, children were introduced to elementary education, where they were taught how to clean the house, interact with guests appropriately, and instructed to read the *Xiaojing* (孝經 The Classic of Filial Piety) and the *Sishu* (四書 Four Books). These books were explained to them, and through them, children learned the rites and courtesies, to restrain their wandering minds, and to cultivate their proper nature. At the age of ten, they were sent to boarding schools where they would reside. Here, they learned to read the classics and historical records to understand the reasons behind good and evil, the difference between right and wrong, and the principles of benefit and harm. Reading various books leads to an understanding of the course of events in the past and present, thereby increasing their knowledge over time and achieving success naturally. As Confucius said, “What one learns in childhood is like one’s inborn temperament; the habits one forms become second nature.”¹⁶

Thus, these are the wise men’s teachings and the methods of educating people. Few people today are fully acquainted with these principles, and they follow common practices instead. Some parents, having a particularly brilliant child, assume the child will succeed on his own and thus neglect his education. Conversely, those who have a child that is not very intelligent believe he will never achieve anything and thus abandon his education.

Some families who rely on their wealth or inherited titles spoil their offspring by allowing them to loiter, causing them to lose their achievements and become accustomed to a lower lifestyle. Such practices are not loving toward their children and bring disgrace to their ancestors. Therefore, raising children without education is not acceptable, and teaching them cannot be lax. Diligent studying and strict teaching, in fact, lead everyone to success. Ancient scholars said: “With education, the children of commoners can become noblemen; without education, the children of nobility can become commoners.” How can we not be cautious about this? Regardless of my shallow and humble words, I have made this guide for teaching children. Wise gentlemen, if you take my words as a reference and put them into practice, it would be fortunate.

¹⁶ The English translation of the sentence is sourced from Tian and Kroll (2021: II.3). Some ideas on education refer to *Yan shi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 (Family Instructions for the Yan Clan), particularly in the section II “Educating Children;” see Tian and Kroll (2021).

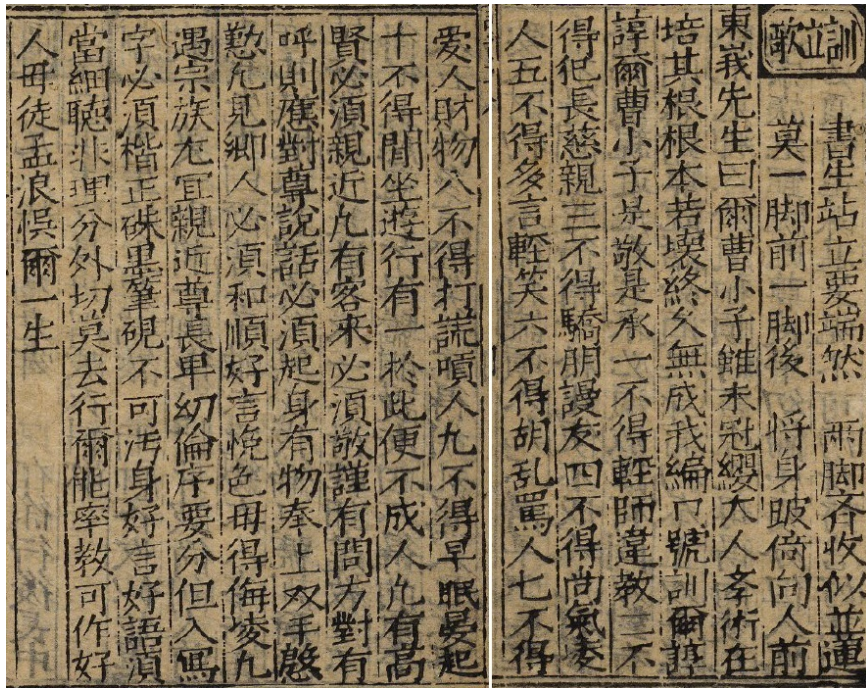


Fig. 2. Detail from the Text. From *Xin ban zengbu tianxia bian yong wenlin miao jin wanbao quanshu* 新板增補天下使用文林妙錦萬寶全書. Harvard-Yenching Library Rare Book T 9299 7224. Public domain, from the Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University. Available at <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl:2093485>.

《訓蒙八規》附彭東峨先生口號歌一十三章¹⁷

一 孝禮：凡為人要識道理，識禮數。在家庭，事父母。入書院，事先生，並要恭敬順從，遵依教誨。與之言則應，教之事則行。敬兄長，處朋友，毋得怠慢，自任己意。¹⁸

¹⁷ In other sources that reference to Mr. Peng Dong'e instructions to children, this text is cited as 彭東峨訓十章 (Peng Dong'e's Ten Instructions) or 彭东峨的《训蒙八规》 (Peng Dong'e's "Eight Rules for Educating the Young"). For example, see *Fan jia ji lue* (範家集略) compiled by Qin Fang 秦坊, volume 6, published by Muxi Xuan in 1871.

¹⁸ These eight regulations are similar—if not completely identical—to the eight rules of Zhen Dexiu (真德秀; 1178–1235) in "Jiaozhi zhagui" (教子齋規 Rules for Educating Children). However, in the Southern Song text, there is no chanted part, and the order of the rules differs. References to the text and the positioning of the rules will be given according to Zhen Dexiu's version in the following notes. In this case, the text is the same except for a minor variation at the end: "一曰學禮。凡為人要識道理，識禮數。在家庭事父母，入書院事先生。並要恭敬順從，遵依教導。與之言則應，教之事而行，毋得怠慢，自任己意。" (Lou Hansong, 2017, vol. 2, p. 881). The same text is also found in *Shilin Guangji* (事林廣記), Later Collection (後集), Volume 9.

The “Eight Regulations for Educating Children” with Mr. Peng Dong’s Thirteen chanted Verses Attached.

First, studying etiquette. To be well-behaved, you must understand the correct principles and the proper etiquette. At home, attend upon your father and mother; at school, you must serve the teachers, be respectful and compliant, and follow their instructions diligently. When they speak to you, respond; when they instruct you to do something, do as you are told. Respect the older peers and get along with friends, without negligence, or acting according to your own whims.

事親歌：父母深恩等昊天，兒當孝順報生全。早晨先起問安否，晚夕還來看坐眠。懷果¹⁹便知思顧養，望雲心每²⁰在親邊。有時打罵并嗔怒，只是和顏與笑言。²¹

- “Song of Serving Parents:” Parents’ deep grace is immense as the sky, and children must express filial piety for their whole lives. Once awake, you must first pay your greetings to your parents giving your regards to them, and in the evening, return to check on their rest. Every time your belly is full, you must think about it is thanks to your parents’ care; every time you see the clouds, you will miss your parents, like your heart is near them. Even when they scold or are angry, respond with a gentle demeanor and smile.

事師歌：師教深恩並父母，尊師重道始能成。百工技藝猶知本，莫作忘恩負義人。

- “Song of Serving Teachers:” The teacher’s deep grace is like that of parents; only by respecting teachers and valuing their teachings can one achieve success. Even artisans and craftsmen recognize that their technique and skills are rooted in their masters. Therefore, do not be ungrateful or forget your obligations.

¹⁹ Here, 果 is interpreted as 果腹 (from *Zhuangzi* 庄子, *Xiaoyao You* 逍遙游), meaning “to have eaten one’s fill”.

²⁰ “望雲思親” is an allusion to filial piety derived from the story of Di Renjie (狄仁傑), one of the Twenty-four Filial Exemplars (二十四孝).

²¹ The songs associated in Ming dynasty with the eight educational rules enjoyed widespread diffusion. An example of this is found in the later Qing book “*Mengyang shi jiao*” (蒙養詩教, The Teaching Poems of Primary Education), compiled by Hu Yuan (胡淵). The passage reads: 父母恩深等昊天，孩童孝順報難全。早晨先起問安否，晚夕還來看坐眠。吃果使思懷顧養，出門須想望雲邊。有時打罵母嗔怒，更要和顏近膝前。(The deep kindness of parents is as vast as the sky; children find it difficult to fully repay their filial piety. In the morning, rise early to greet them and ask how they are; in the evening, return to check on their rest. Eating should remind you of their care and nourishment. When leaving home, remember to think of them as you look towards the clouds. When they sometimes scold and get angry, be even more gentle and stay close by their side).

事兄歌：兄友弟兮²²弟敬兄，天然倫序自分明。席間務讓兄居左，路上應該弟後行。酒食先須供長者，貨財切勿起爭心。諄諄誨汝無他意，原是同胞共乳人。

- “Song of Serving the Older Brother:” The older brother has affection for the younger one, and the younger one respects the older one. This natural order is clear and distinct. At meals, let your elder brother sit on the left; when walking, the younger brother should walk behind. Offer food and drinks first to the elders and do not covet others’ possessions. This sincere teaching is simply a reminder that you both were born of the same parents and nurtured by the same person.

處友歌：朋友之交道若何？少年為弟長為(歌* sic 哥)。同行共席須謙讓，立志存心²³互切摩。終日群居談道義，青春可惜莫蹉跎。休論富貴與貧賤，同氣相求²⁴所益多。

- “Song of Getting Along with Friends:” How should one interact with friends? If you are younger, behave like a younger brother; if older, be as an elder brother. When walking or dining together, always be modest and considerate. Set your mind and keep the purity of your heart, and through the exchange of opinions, both of you will benefit. Spend the day in groups discussing principles and righteousness. Cherish your youth and do not waste time. Do not judge friends based on wealth or social status; friends with shared interests and morality will be more beneficial to each other.

二季誦：專心看字，斷句慢讀，須要字字分明，毋得目視東西，手執他物。²⁵

Second, studying reading aloud. Focus on reading words carefully. Read slowly and with proper pauses, and ensure each word is distinct. Do not let your eyes wander or fiddle with other things.

訓讀歌：讀書端的要專心，義禮求明辨字音，諷誦務宜多遍數，晨昏須自細推尋，聖經賢傳同天地，善訓嘉言無古今，誠向此中求受用，一生勝積萬贏金。

- “Song of Instructions on Reading:” When reading, it is crucial to concentrate. Strive to understand the meanings and distinguish the sounds of the characters. It is important to recite them plenty of times, to meditate and reflect on the texts with care from morning till evening. The classics compiled by sages and the works explained by wise men are as vast as heaven and earth, good instructions and fine words are timeless. Sincerely seeking to gain usefulness from them is more valuable than accumulating ten thousand pieces of gold in a lifetime.

²² Reminds “兄友弟恭” (the older brother take care of the younger brother, and the younger brother respect the older brother) in *Shiji*, “History of the Five Early Emperors” by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (史記·五帝本紀 *Shiji, Wudi benji, juan 1*).

²³ From Mengzi 孟子: “存心養性” (preserve his heart and nourish his nature); Mengzi (Mencius), *Jinxin Part I*, (盡心上).

²⁴ Concept from the *Yijing* 易經: “同聲相應，同氣相求。” (Notes of the same key respond to one another; creatures of the same nature seek one another). See *Zhouyi zhengyi* “Qian” 乾, “Wenyan” 文言, 20; Legge, *I Ching*, 411.

²⁵ Zhen Dexiu’s seventh teaching, same verse.

三季坐：定坐端身，齊腳斂手，毋得偃仰傾側。²⁶

Third, studying how to sit. Sit upright and still, with your feet aligned and your hands gathered, without slouching or leaning.

訓坐歌：坐時義（?又）手肅容儀，端拱安然似塑泥。莫把一身偏左右，謾將兩手弄東西²⁷。與人並坐休橫股，獨坐之時亦整衣。記得古人言一句，坐如尸也是吾師。²⁸

- “Song of instructions on sitting:” When sitting, keep your hands crossed and maintain a respectful demeanor. Sit upright and calm, like a statue molded from clay. Do not let your body lean left or right, and avoid fidgeting with anything. When sitting beside others, do not stretch your legs laterally towards them; when sitting alone, neaten your clothing. Remember what the ancients said: “Sitting still and motionless (like a corpse) is how you must learn to be”.

四季言：朴實語事，勿得妄誕，朗然出聲，毋得低喚。

Fourth, Studying to Speak. When speaking, one must sincerely tell the truth, avoid falsehood and exaggeration, and speak loudly and clearly; do not speak too softly or mumble.²⁹

訓言歌：說話從今切勿輕，輕言動輒取人嗔。尊長問時從實對，友朋相處露情真。打謊哄噴人輕薄子，至誠應物聖賢人。平無妄語溫公者，分付兒曹要景行。

- “Song of Instructions on Speaking:” Be careful from now on not to speak carelessly; reckless words always provoke others’ anger. Answer elders truthfully and interact genuinely with friends. Liars and deceitful people are frivolous, while those who respond to things with utmost sincerity are sages and virtuous men. Never telling lies in daily life is what the Duke of Wen³⁰ did, and I ask you children to follow his example and practice.

²⁶ Zhen Dexiu’s second teaching, slightly different verse: 定身端坐，齊腳斂雙手。毋得伏槩靠背，偃仰傾側。

²⁷ The same song of Dong Peng’e, classified as a Ming text, is quoted in Qin Fang 秦坊, *Fan jia ji lue* 範家集略, 6 卷, 1871, but the last sentences changed slightly. The text is available at <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044068324912>

²⁸ This sentence comes from *Liji* 禮記: “若夫，坐如屍” (*Liji, Qu Li* 曲禮 I, 4).

²⁹ Zhen Dexiu’s fifth teaching, slightly different verse: 五曰學言。樸實語事，毋得妄誕。低細出聲，毋得叫喚。

³⁰ Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), whose honorific posthumous title was Sima Wen Gong 司馬溫公, or Sima, Duke of Wen, is referred to here in connection with his well-known biography and integrity. The association between Sima Guang and the concept of 不妄語 (not speaking deceitfully) can already be seen in the text *Zhuxi yu lei da quan* (朱子語類大全, also known as *朱子語類 Zhuxi yulei*), see Zhu Xi 1998, p. 693. During the Ming dynasty, for example in the *Shengxun yan* 聖訓演, it is clearly illustrated how, according to Sima Guang, a person must be honest and always strive not to tell lies: “溫公曰: 「其誠乎。吾平生力行之，未嘗須臾離也。故立朝行己，俯仰無愧爾。」公問: 「行之何先?」溫公曰: 「自不妄語始，自是拳拳弗失，終身行之。」” see Lin Jinwei 2023, p. 202.

訓食歌：飲食隨時飽便休，不宜揀擇與貪求。若同尊席毋先宰，便是同行務遜酌。魚肉喫殘須勿反，飯湯流啜甚堪羞。遺羨讓果垂青史³¹，妬食之人乃下流。

- “Song of Instructions on Eating:” You must eat and drink at the right time but also know when to stop if you are full. It’s not good to be picky and gluttonous. If you are at a meal with elders and superiors, do not start eating first; even with people at your level, you must be modest and courteous when you toast. When eating fish, do not turn it over to the other side, and it is shameful to let juice fall from your mouth when you drink the soup. Those who share food generously with others will have a good reputation in history, whereas those who are greedy with food will be despised.

五孝書：臻志把筆，並(probably carved wrongly for 字 or missing 字) 要齊整圓淨，毋得胡塗。³²

Fifth, studying writing. Concentrate your mind when holding the pen; the characters must be written neatly and orderly. Do not scribble or smudge.

訓字歌：童蒙習字用心勤，書畫端楷却為真。手中把筆宜正直，紙上揮毫要分明。莫道登場重文士，須知臨池敬書人³³，若有糊塗幼不改，老來體法寫無成。

- “Song of Instructions on Characters:” Young learners should diligently practice writing with care. In writing and calligraphy, the regular style is the best. Hold the brush upright in your hand, and ensure that each brushstroke is clear and distinct on the paper. No wonder that those who can pass the exams are all good calligraphers; you kids must dedicate yourself to practicing handwriting, following the example of Zhang Zhi. If, in your young age, you always write sloppily and do not correct it, you will fail to write properly in old age.

六孝揖：低頭屈腰，出聲收手，毋得輕率慢易。³⁴

Sixth, studying greetings. Bow with your head lowered and your torso bent forward. After saying your greeting, retract your hands. Do not act hastily or carelessly.

訓揖歌：逢人作揖請昇東，腳要並齊腰要躬，低頭落手頻過膝，平身收手漫按胸，若遇尊者須敬上，下拜不必論西東，謾道尊人施禮淺，少年勿與老年同。

³¹ 穎考叔，孔融讓果 quotation from two stories connected to filial piety.

³² Zhen Dexiu’s eight teaching, written quite similarly: 臻 (聚也) 志把筆，字要齊整圓淨。毋得輕易胡塗。 For the interpretation of the first part of the encyclopedic text, the text of Zhen Dexiu was referenced.

³³ Reference to Zhang Zhi 張芝’s story, renowned for his dedication to calligraphy, famously known for practicing his writing skills until the pond turned black with ink. This story illustrates his extreme commitment and diligence in perfecting his craft.

³⁴ Zhen Dexiu’s sixth teaching, same verse.

- “Song of Instructions on Greetings:” When you meet someone, bow with your hands folded in front and let them stand on the east side. Your feet should be parallel, and your torso should be bent. Lower your head and let your hands fall past your knees. Stand up straight, bring your hands back, and gently place them on your chest. When you encounter an elder or superior, you must show respect by performing the kowtow. When bowing on your knees, it is not necessary to choose a specific orientation. Do not criticize the greetings of superior people as being insufficient, as young people and elderly people are not in the same position.

七孝行: 籠袖隨行, 毋得掉臂跳足。³⁵

Seventh, studying walking. When you walk, fold your arms and tuck them into the opposite sleeves. Do not swing your arms or jump.

訓行歌: 行時無事莫匆匆, 休與顛狂一樣同, 怕有崎嶇須隱(穩)重, 恐遭傾跌(跌)失儀容, 但遇親鄰深作揖, 若逢尊長後相從, 凡人皆可為堯舜³⁶, 只在徐行後長中。

- “Song of Instructions on Walking:” When walking, do not rush if there is nothing urgent. Do not behave like a madman. Be cautious of uneven paths and walk steadily, to prevent falling and losing your composure. When meeting relatives or neighbors, bow deeply with your hands folded in front. If you encounter superior or elders, follow them: everyone can become as virtuous as Yao or Shun by walking slowly behind the elderly.³⁷

八孝立: 拱手立身, 毋得跛衣(sic*倚)斜欹。³⁸

Eighth, studying standing. Stand with hands clasped, maintaining a straight posture without limping, leaning, or standing at an angle.

訓立歌: 書生站立要端然, 兩腳齊收似並蓮。莫一腳前一腳後, 將身跛倚向人前。

- “Song of Instructions on Standing:” Students must stand upright, with both feet together and parallel, like twin lotuses. Do not place one foot in front of the other or limp forward.

東峨先生曰: 爾曹小子, 雖未冠纓, 大人孝術, 在培其根, 根本若壞, 終久無成。我編口號, 訓爾諄諄。爾曹小子, 是敬是承。

³⁵ Zhen Dexiu’s third teaching, same verse.

³⁶The Emperors Yao and Shun are often cited as the highest standards of humanity. This reference aligns with the dialogue in Mencius, Gaozi Part II: 曹交問曰: “人皆可以為堯舜, 有諸?” 孟子曰: “然。” (“Jiao of Cao asked Mencius, ‘Is it true that ‘All men may be Yaos and Shuns?’” Mencius replied, ‘Yes, it is.’”). (Mengzi 4.2.32)

³⁷ This concept is derived from Mengzi, Gaozi Part II, where it is said: “徐行后長者謂之弟, 疾行先長者謂之不弟。”

³⁸ Zhen Dexiu’s fourth teaching, same verse: 拱手立身, 毋得跛倚欹斜.

一不得輕師違教，二不得犯長慈親，三不得驕朋謾友，四不得尚氣凌人，五不得多言輕笑，六不得胡亂罵人，七不得愛人財物，八不得打謊噴人，九不得早眠晏起，十不得閒坐遊行。

有一於此，便不成人。凡有高賢，必須親近。

凡有客來，必須敬謹。有問方對，有呼則應對尊說話，必須起身。有物奉上，双手殷勤。

凡見鄉人，必須和順。好言悅色，毋得侮凌。

凡遇宗族，尤宜親近，尊長卑幼，倫序要分。

但入寫字，必須楷正。硃墨筆硯，不可污身。

好言好語，須當細聽，非理分外，切莫去行。

爾能率教，可作好人，毋徒孟浪，悞爾一生。

Mister Dong'e said:

“You, little children, even though you have not yet grown up, the foundation of adult learning lies in cultivating the root. If your roots are rotten, you will not achieve success. I have compiled these verses to provide you with sincere teachings. Children, respect and practice them:

1. Do not offend teachers or disobey their instructions.
2. Do not offend elders or parents.
3. Do not be arrogant with friends or mock them.
4. Do not act aggressively or oppress others.
5. Do not talk too much or laugh frivolously.
6. Do not curse or scold people carelessly.
7. Do not covet others' possessions.
8. Do not lie or deceive others.
9. Do not sleep too early or get up too late.
10. Do not sit idly or wander aimlessly.

If you commit even one of these faults, you will not become a mature person (成人).

Always approach virtuous and wise people and learn from them. When guests arrive, always be respectful and cautious. Answer questions directly when asked and respond promptly when called. When speaking to elders and superiors, stand up and offer items with both hands sincerely. Always be gentle and respectful to fellow villagers. Speak kindly, with a friendly expression, and do not insult or bully others.

Whenever you encounter your clan, be close to your clan members, and remember to respect the hierarchy and age differences: those who are superior and older, versus those who are inferior and younger.

Characters must be written correctly and in the proper style. When using brushes, do not make red or black ink stains on yourself.

Listen carefully to good words and advice. Avoid unreasonable actions.

If you follow these teachings, you will become a good person. Do not be reckless, and do not ruin your life.”

4. Innovations made in tradition

The chosen case study exemplifies a printed text from the genre *riyong leishu*, reflecting the prevalent pedagogical knowledge during the Ming and Early Qing periods. The chapter *Xuntong men* is constructed by integrating various sources, as noted in the annotations. This compilation reveals the enduring influence of Southern Song pedagogical production, which continued to be a primary reference for child education in the Ming era. Neo-Confucianism, particularly Zhu Xi’s teachings, along with quotations from classical texts like the *Mengzi* and the *Liji*, are evident in the chapter. However, there are also notable innovations.

The chapter incorporates the *Xunmen ba gui* (Eight Rules for Teaching Children), originally listed by Zhen Dexiu and subsequently included in the *Shilin guangji* with a different arrangement. The changes made in this chapter during the Ming Dynasty, with the addition of Peng Dong’e’s songs, adapted Confucian ethical norms to the practical lives of readers. The texts referenced underwent significant reduction and simplification: for example, the sections on rituals related to clothing and utensils, which were prohibitively expensive for ordinary individuals, were omitted to bridge the gap between affluent and humble readers (Wei 2015: 184). The text caters to a pragmatic audience, particularly traders, by emphasizing a reward-centered mindset: adhering to specific behaviors grants one a rightful role in society. Additionally, elements of self-cultivation for health preservation (*yangsheng*) are mentioned, reflecting interests from Daoist manuals and medical anthologies frequently cited in Ming-era everyday encyclopedias.

The text alternates between prose and seven-character poetry, concluding with a mix of seven- and four-character lines. This rhythmic and accessible format facilitates memorization and oral transmission, even among the illiterate, thereby promoting the dissemination of Confucian ethics to the broader population. Simplifying and summarizing traditional concepts into catchy poetry enhances the common person’s perceptual understanding.

The author addresses readers in the first person, adding an element of interaction that captures attention and strengthens engagement. However, the focus of these teachings is not on the needs of infants but on how to quickly transition them into their adult social roles.

5. Conclusion

Riyong leishu texts provide a reflection of Ming-era society. The chapter on childhood education analyzed here offers insight into the sources and techniques used to educate children in the 17th century, particularly the methods employed to facilitate memorization of rules necessary for becoming adults (*chengren*). Musicality as a mnemonic device was highly valued in China, evident in the use of three, four, five, or seven-character sentences in primers, along with rhymes and parallel couplets, such as the quadrisyllabic structure used in the *Qianzi Wen* (Lee 2000: 467). These educational texts, as well as daily-use encyclopedias with simpler language and songs, benefitted from the development of print production, leading to widespread diffusion both within China and beyond its borders (Brokaw 2005, 2007, 2020).

During the 17th century, many encyclopedic texts reached Japan, where they were studied and used as models for later Japanese editions.³⁹ Texts such as *Mingxin baojian* 明心宝鉴 (Precious Mirror for Illuminating the Heart), a collection of moral aphorisms for children's education compiled in the 14th century by Fan Liben 范立本, also gained popularity in Korea (Clart 2018). These texts circulated alongside other Chinese primers for children, such as *Qianzi Wen*, *Tongmeng xianxi* 童蒙先習 (Children's First Learning), and Zhu Xi's *Xiao xue* 小學⁴⁰ (Elementary Learning).

It is noteworthy how these texts, focused on children's education, extended beyond the Chinese cultural sphere and attracted the attention of European missionaries in China. These missionaries brought the books back to Europe or in some cases undertook their translation. Several editions of popular everyday encyclopedias, primarily derived from the *Wanbao quanshu* text, circulated in Europe, as evidenced by collections of Chinese books originating from Jesuit contacts starting in the 17th century (Magnani 2020).

³⁹ Regarding the transmission of encyclopedic texts in East Asia, see “The Transmission of *Wanbao quanshu* to Japan in the Early Edo Period: Their Role in the Compilation of Educational Texts” by Lin Kuei-ju, and “The Transmission and Translation of the *Wanbao quanshu* in Chosŏn Korea” by Ch'oe Yongch'ŏl 崔溶澈 in Brokaw (2020).

⁴⁰ Cfr. Kang (2006: 208).

Western missionaries were particularly drawn to Chinese educational materials as a means to understand the roots of Chinese culture and society. The *Mingxin baojian*, for instance, was among the first Chinese books translated into a European language. The Dominican missionary Juan Cobo (1546/47–1592) translated it into Spanish at the end of the 16th century, and recent research suggests Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607) had earlier translated it into Latin (Hu & Zhang, 2022).⁴¹ Missionaries recognized the importance of structuring texts in simple sentences with a consistent number of characters, giving the text a rhythmic quality for easier comprehension. For instance, Giulio Aleni (1582–1649), while living in Fujian, created the *Four Character Classic* (*Sizijingwen* 四字經文) by emulating the children’s primer *Sanzijing*, structuring the text in four-character sentences (Clark 2021).

However, missionaries did not always successfully capture the rhythm or technical refinements such as parallelism or tone patterns (平仄, *pingze*) typical of Chinese classical poetry⁴². Nonetheless, they fully adopted the idea that rhythmic structures and songs could indeed aid in teaching children and preaching the mass.

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⁴¹ These translations did not disseminate widely in Europe until 1676, when the translation by the Dominican friar Domingo Fernández de Navarrete (1618–1686) was published.

⁴² In this regard, see the analysis of Michele Ruggieri’s Chinese poems by Zhang Xiping (2024).

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