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<i>For completion by student:</i>		
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<i>Supervisor:</i> Chen Fengyuan 陳逢源	<i>Word count:</i> 3,065	
I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on plagiarism. Signed <i>Chun Han</i>		
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English Review of Dissertation

The task I set myself was A Study of the Imperial Annotation of the *Classic of Filial Piety* 孝經 by Emperor Shizu of the Qing Dynasty. Before doing the research related to the *Classic of Filial Piety*, I did not know much about its content or academic status. The first time I paid attention to this classic was when Venerable Master Chin Kung gave a talk on Buddhist scriptures, in which he said that the *Earth Store Sutra* 地藏經 is the Buddhist version of the *Classic of Filial Piety*. I became curious about the *Classic of Filial Piety*. After looking up some information about it, I learnt that although it is the shortest classic among the *Thirteen Classics* 十三經, it has a high academic status, as evidenced by the fact that many emperors and kings wrote annotations for this classic. I was further intrigued and wanted to find out why the *Classic of Filial Piety* was so highly regarded. Therefore, I chose the *Classic of Filial Piety* as the topic for my undergraduate thesis. But due to the lack of academic knowledge at that time, I could not study it in depth, which means I only had a very limited understanding of the contents and connotations of the text of the *Classic of Filial Piety*. I have always had the idea of continuing my study in the *Classic of Filial Piety* in depth.

Now I have the honour of studying the Confucian classics at the Academy of Sinology, and under the guidance of several professional teachers with rich knowledge, I have read more Confucian classics. Under the guidance of several professional teachers with rich knowledge, I have read more Confucian classics, and I have been able to conduct more in-depth studies to understand the deeper connotations behind the texts. I found that I could see the *Classic of Filial Piety* was mentioned in these classics in order to teach people that cultivating one's own virtues is the foundation of being a person. I had a deeper understanding of what the Venerable Master Chin Kung said: 'Filial piety is the foundation of traditional Chinese culture.' In studying any classic, the deeper meaning can be discovered through filial piety. As a result, my interest in the study of the *Classic of Filial Piety* has enhanced, and I have chosen it as the topic for my master's dissertation in the hope of deepening my understanding of this important

Confucian classic.

There are many directions of researches on the *Classic of Filial Piety*. After reading a lot of materials, I found that different scholars have different understandings of it, as well as different entry points and directions of research. For example, some scholars have studied the development of the history of the *Classic of Filial Piety*, some have studied the two different versions, and some have studied the *Classic of Filial Piety* in the context of child education, etc. For me, the most interesting perspective is the imperial annotation. In ancient China, the wise emperors would follow the principles of the *Classic of Filial Piety* and rule the world by filial piety. Therefore, I am curious about whether the perspective of emperors is the same as that of ordinary scholars.

Initially, I wanted to write an analysis of the characteristics of the imperial annotations of the emperors in order to explore the political functions of the *Classic of Filial Piety*, which are different from those of general academic studies, by combining the different backgrounds of different times and exploring the philosophy of governance behind them. However, after a brief search for information, I realised that choosing such a research direction would be a long-term task requiring in-depth study. My current academic ability is not sufficient to support such a large amount of textual reading within a short period of time. Moreover, the maximum number of words of the dissertation is 11,000, which means it is impossible to make a detailed discussion under this word limit. Thus, the plan was changed to a comparative study of the imperial annotations of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang and Emperor Shizu of Qing. Subsequently, on the advice of the supervisor, the scope was narrowed down to the study of one emperor, that is, the imperial annotations of Emperor Shizu of the Qing Dynasty. When it came to the structuring of the thesis, a lot of complicated frameworks were initially envisaged, as there were many aspects of the thesis to be covered. This led to a lack of ideas for writing the paper. Later on, I changed my mind and adopted the simplest model. As the Qing Dynasty was in its early stages of establishment, the background to the imperial annotation is explored in terms of its successors, and its influence in terms of its relevance to later generations. Although this framework is simple, it reduces a lot of troubles. After I consulted the teacher, he also agreed with the proposed structure of the thesis. This began a challenging but rewarding process of

dissertation writing.

The Challenges to Face and Overcome

There are many challenges facing dissertation writing, both objective and subjective.

The first objective challenge is the obtaining of texts. The main subject of my dissertation is the Qing Shizu's *Imperial Annotation on the Classic of Filial Piety* 御注孝經, and there are five other ancient texts that I have analysed in comparison. Three of them are relatively easy to obtain: Tang Xuanzong's and Xing Bing's *Annotation on the Classic of Filial Piety* 孝經注疏, Qing Shengzu's (Kangxi 康熙) *Derivation of the Classic of Filial Piety* 御定孝經衍義, and Qing Shizong's (Yongzheng 雍正) *Imperial Compilation of Collected Annotations on the Classic of Filial Piety* 御纂孝經集注. All of them can be searched in the *Photocopying Wen Yuan Ge Siku Quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書 published by the Commercial Press in Taiwan. Another book, Lyu Weiqi's *The Complete Works of the Classic of Filial Piety* 孝經大全, was initially found to have unclear handwriting and was difficult to recognise in many places. After searching through various channels, I found a very clear copy of the Meng Yueyan Collection Edition. Unfortunately, the page numbers were not easy to search, and it was not suitable for use as a footnote to the dissertation. It is still a very good and valuable material. There is also a copy of Chen Xuan's *Collected Annotations on the Classic of Filial Piety* 孝經集注, which was initially found to be a collection of auction items. After much searching, it was found to be included in the appendix of Zhu Xi's *Xiaoxue Jizhu* 小學集注, but it was only included in a few ancient texts, and no electronic resources could be found.

Faced with the difficulty of acquiring texts, I sought help from others when I really could not solve the problem by myself. My classmate helped me find Lyu Weiqi's *The Complete Works of the Classic of Filial Piety* in the *Renewed Siku Quanshu* 續修四庫全書, which was very helpful in searching for page numbers and writing footnotes. I enquired about the collection of Zhu Xi's *Xiaoxue Jizhu* in the Capital Library of China, so I found a stranger on a social media platform and asked her to photocopy the book. Because this ancient book is very

precious, readers must have references for relevant academic reading needs. This stranger happened to fulfil the requirement. How fortunate! I also realised that if you really put in the effort to do something, someone will definitely help you and good luck will surely come your way.

The second objective challenge is the reading of the text. After obtaining the text, because of the differences in the editions of different time periods and periodicals, I had to spend additional effort in confirming the exact edition needed and in identifying the most worthwhile academic references. Since most of the materials read are ancient classics published without punctuation marks, before analysing the meaning of the text, it is necessary to first break the sentences to determine where the commas and full stops are. In some cases, it is necessary to look up the information again to assist the sentence breaks for some incomprehensible contents. On the other hand, the paper originally intended to present two tables comparing the *Imperial Annotation on the Classic of Filial Piety* 御注孝經 with the *Annotation on the Classic of Filial Piety* 孝經注疏 and *The Complete Works of the Classic of Filial Piety* 孝經大全 respectively. However, after collation, it was found that the text contained nearly 70,000 words. As a result, a lot of comparisons have to be made among the abundant data. Moreover, if the table is presented in the appendix, 70,000 words would be too large. It was a great challenge to simplify it and to judge the required text quickly, accurately and efficiently, and to make detailed and accurate comparisons.

In addition, it is impossible to accurately grasp the ideological, political and cultural factors behind the text. This part of the paper is precisely the best part of the text, but I do not have a good understanding of the *Lixu* 理學 and *Xinxue* 心學, and I do not have the relevant knowledge. This also hindered me from grasping the meaning behind the text. As a result, after comparing the texts, I could only superficially analyse the words and phrases, and my discussion was thin and not in-depth enough to reach my expected academic heights. This made me want to give up the project, feeling that my dissertation research had no academic value.

Faced with the difficulty of reading the text, after seeking help from my teachers and classmates, I found that there were already modern punctuated versions of the *Imperial*

Annotation on the Classic of Filial Piet 御注孝經, *Imperial Compilation of Collected Annotations on the Filial Piety Classic* 御纂孝經集注, and *The Complete Works of the Classic of Filial Piety* 孝經大全, which were extremely convenient for me to read the text. The first two of these books were collected in the *General Explanation of the Filial Piety Classic* 孝經通釋, and because there were no digital resources, I purchased two paperbacks. One was photographed by my father to make an e-version for reading, and the other was brought to me by a fellow student who flew to the UK, and it was a bumpy ride to finally be able to make use of this resource. As for the large amount of text, I concentrated on selecting the most important parts in a few days and cut them down to nearly 30,000 words, thus relieving half of the pressure of reading. However, as for the part on ideology, since it involves the history of economics and the influence of the ideological trends of different dynasties, it cannot be mastered in a short period of time or just by reading some papers. Therefore, it is still difficult for me to research and write an exposition on this part of the book.

The third objective challenge is the design of the tables. Since the paper involves a large number of textual comparisons, it would be clearer to present it in a table. However, there are different forms that are more appropriate for different content comparisons. As a result, the presentation in the whole text would be inconsistent and somewhat confusing. Furthermore, the standard academic writing restricts the use of diversity, such as changing the colour of fonts and highlighting notes to show similarities and differences. Therefore, choosing a more appropriate form of comparison and creating clearer tables has become an urgent problem to be solved. How to use concise language to make a clear presentation requires a high level of logical thinking, summarisation and discernment.

To face this challenge, the supervisor gave me a suggestion to standardise the format of the table and add serial numbers to make it easier to read. Streamline the text in the table, and use the table as an argument to support the dissertation, instead of copying and pasting the text in its entirety. At the same time, the table is designed to show different comparisons using single underlines, double underlines and wavy lines, making good use of the table's presentation function in text comparisons. After the changes, it was found to be more conducive to the

argumentative nature of the paper, and it was also easier to illustrate features through the use of underlining. For example, the part of the table where both columns are underlined, it can be seen intuitively that the comparison objects are exactly the same. It was also important to understand more about what the supervisor was suggesting and what conclusions could be drawn from the presentation of the table.

Due to the above objective challenges, the preliminary work took a lot of time and effort, which made me mentally fearful of the difficulties and doubtful that I should not have chosen this topic. Emotionally, I was in a slump, which led to a very slow pace of writing. As soon as I thought there were tens of thousands of words of text to compare, I started to procrastinate. I was also under a great deal of psychological pressure due to time constraints caused by poor time planning in the early stages of the project, as well as the need to improve my academic skills.

In the face of subjective challenges, it is important to take the initiative to solve them. Adjust my mindset, calm down my mood, look out of the window to relax after long hours of looking at the computer screen, or go out for a walk for health benefits. Face the problem calmly. Explore with classmates the idea of writing dissertations and ask for advice on how to handle the reference texts. With encouragement from my teacher, I can regain the confidence to tackle the problem one step at a time. For example, when faced with a large text, I set a small goal of comparing one chapter per day, and then looked up information to help me understand the underlying thought process. The setting of small goals allows the large text to be broken down into small pieces that are within reach. When I look back, I find that I have achieved my goals one after another, and I feel a sense of accomplishment. In addition, as I read and organise the data, I discovered many aspects that I had not noticed before, and I actively learnt a lot of new knowledge, which made the originally thought to be boring work of comparing and contrasting become interesting. More importantly, I was able to understand the emperor's intention to rule the world with filial piety as the supreme ruler of a country through the text. This also made the initial motivation and problematic awareness satisfied step by step.

Experiences learnt

Looking back at the writing of the dissertation, there is still a certain distance from the initial

idea. Of course, this is also due to the fact that the idea was rather idealistic, and I did not take into account the limitations of word count, time and academic ability. Therefore, the progress was more difficult than expected.

The next time I write a paper, I will decide in advance the appropriate range of topics based on the number of words. For example, focusing on a small topic and developing a full discussion. Avoid topics that are too big and too many aspects. Because it leads to every point I want to mention, but none of them has a complete logical chain of discourse.

Secondly, when searching for information, consulting others and learning more from the research results of previous researchers may yield twice the result with half the effort.

Thirdly, do not blindly pursue the amount of information, thinking that more is better. On the one hand, reading too much information may cause excessive consumption of energy and even enthusiasm for writing. On the other hand, I should pay attention to the quality of the information to ensure the accuracy and timeliness of the information.

Fourthly, the focus of the writing should be clear, so as not to deviate from the theme and lose the focus by discussing too much in the branches. For example, in the early stages of writing, a great deal of space was spent on the background of the writing of *The Complete Works of the Classic of Filial Piety*, but in fact, as a comparative text, the main contents were the scriptures and the social trends of thought at that time. What has been written is irrelevant and then deleted later. If the focus of the dissertation is taken into account in the early stage, there will not be such a problem.

Fifthly, there should be a scientific and reasonable time allocation plan to avoid procrastination or wastage on matters other than the main subject. In addition, it is important to avoid not having enough time to complete the dissertation. Because if this is the case, a lot of comparative analysis work carried out in the early stage can not be well presented in the paper. This is a disappointment to the efforts made in the early stage.

Finally, read the guidebook on essay writing and learnt how to write essays. Although I have read some materials on writing guidance, I have not used them well in practice. For example, in *Succeeding with Your Master's Dissertation, A Step-By-Step Handbook*, it explains in detail what a dissertation is, what skills are needed, and the arrangement of each chapter. Chapter

Twelve summarises the good practices to adopt and the bad practices to avoid.¹ If I had learnt and applied them in advance, I believe I would have been able to write my thesis more smoothly.

Through the writing of this dissertation, I discovered my ability to patiently read a large number of texts, strengthened the application of the method of documentary research, and enhanced my ability to read and analyse ancient texts without punctuation. At the same time, I also found that I still lacked the ability to sort out the historical and classical contexts networks and the ability to analyse the contrasting ideas. I hope that I will continue to accumulate and improve steadily in my future academic research.

I am grateful to my teachers and classmates for their support and encouragement, to predecessors for their rich research results, to all those who have given me help, and to myself for bravely accepting challenges and solving difficulties.

¹ John Biggam, *Succeeding with Your Master's Dissertation, A Step-By-Step Handbook* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2011), pp. 253-258.