



Undergraduate assignment feedback form

(to be completed by marker)

<i>Student Name: Yushi Ye</i>	
<i>Module Code: SICH5004</i> <i>Module title: The Governing Principles of Ancient China: Selected Readings in the Book of Poetry and Book of History</i>	<i>Student number: 1902852</i>
<i>For completion by marker:</i> <i>Comments:</i>	
<i>Marker's signature:</i>	<i>Date:</i>
<i>Provisional mark:</i> NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the final examination board.	

The Brief Discussion on the traditional Feminine virtue and its influence in *Getan* 葛覃 of the *Collection of Poems* 詩經

Student name: Yushi Ye

SID: 1902852

Date: 9 Dec 2020

Word count: 2095

Professor Wong, Miss Deng, good afternoon and good mornign. My name is Ye Yushi, today I'd like to share with you the topic of 'The Brief Discussion on the traditional Feminine virtue and its influence in *Getan* 葛覃 of the *Collection of Poems* 詩經'. The presentation will be divided into four parts. First is the introduction. Secondly, I will explain the meaning of the text of *Getan* and have a brief discussion. Then I will explore the illumination of traditional feminine virtue to modern society. Finally, I will have a conclusion.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the world exists opposite and conflicts everywhere. Many people are looking for ways to defuse the unrest but find no answer. In fact, the root cause of these disorder is the family. The family conflict is the beginning of the social conflict. Because if people cannot get along with each other harmoniously in family, it will gradually extend to the dissension among groups, discord in society, turbulence of the country and even the chaos in the world.

For example, according to recent divorce statistics, 42 per cent of marriages in England and Wales end in divorce. 102,007 couples divorced in 2017.¹ With the increasing of divorce rate, many children are forced to grow up in single-parent families or reorganized families, losing their healthy and happy childhood. Therefore, it is the aspiration of many people to build a harmonious family, which requires everyone's common efforts. If couples can fulfil their different duties in family, which naturally leads to family happiness. Therefore, the woman plays a very important role. As mother, wife and daughter, her virtue and wisdom play a decisive role in the harmony and prosperity of the family.

The Collection of Poems is the earliest collection of poems in China, with a total of 305 poems. Among them, there are 160 folk songs of 15 different countries which reflects the real life of the people in the Western Zhou Dynasty. *Getan* is a poem of them for praising feminine virtues. Therefore, this article intends to take *Getan* in *the Collection of Poems* as an example to explore the cultivation and influence of feminine virtues.

2. The explanation for classical text of *Getan*

First of all, let's look at the classical text of *Getan*. It is translated by James Legge, which is sincere and simple, making people immersive.

How the dolichos spread itself out,
Extending to the middle of the valley!
Its leaves were luxuriant;
The yellow birds flew about,
And collected on the thickly growing trees,
Their pleasant note resounding far.

¹ Office for National Statistics, 'Divorces in England and Wales'
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/divorce/datasets/divorcesinenglandandwales>, accessed in 3 December 2020.

How the dolichos spread itself out,
 Extending to the middle of the valley!
 Its leaves were luxuriant and dense.
 I cut it and I boiled it,
 And made both fine cloth and coarse,
 Which I will wear without getting tired of it.
 I have told the matron,
 Who will announce that I am going to see my parents.
 I will wash my private clothes clean,
 And I will rinse my robes.
 Which need to be rinsed, and which do not?
 I am going back to visit my parents.²

(葛之覃兮，施於中谷，維葉萋萋。黃鳥于飛，集於灌木，其鳴啾啾。
 葛之覃兮，施於中谷，維葉莫莫。是刈是濩，為絺為綌，服之無斃。
 言告師氏，言告言歸。薄污我私，薄浣我衣。害浣害否，歸寧父母。)

The poem of *Getan* describes a married woman who are ready to go back to parents' home for a visit. *Ge*(葛) is the general name for the dolichos tribe, and its fibres can make a kind of cloth.³

2.1 The explanation for the first chapter

The first chapter describes a beautiful mountain scenery in spring. It is inspired by the extend of dolichos, representing the girl cultivates her virtue and beauty when she still not married. 'How the dolichos spread itself out, extending to the middle of the valley! Its leaves were luxuriant.' (葛之覃兮，施於中谷，維葉萋萋。)⁴ The sentence is inspiration (*xingti* 興體). The valley represents parents' home of the girl, and the dolichos represents the girl herself. The process of dolichos extend to the valley means that the girl gradually grows up. Besides, the luxuriance of the leaves means that both the virtue and appearance of the girl are very good.

'The yellow birds flew about, and collected on the thickly growing trees, their pleasant note resounding far.' (黃鳥於飛，集於灌木；其鳴啾啾。)⁵ The sentence

² James Legge, *The Chinese Classics IV: The She King* (Shanghai: Huadong Shifan University Press, 2011), p6-7.

³ James Legge, *The She King*, p6-7.

⁴ James Legge, *The She King*, p6.

⁵ James Legge, *The She King*, p6.

is also inspiration. What the beautiful bird collected on the trees means that the good girl should also be happily married. The pleasant note of birds resounding far represents that the reputation of girl's virtue and talent has spread far away.

2.2 The explanation for the second chapter

The second chapter also describes the extend of dolichos. Then talking about the girl hard work to weaving dolichos cloth, representing she is diligent and frugal.

How the dolichos spread itself out, extending to the middle of the valley! Its leaves were luxuriant and dense. I cut it and I boiled it, and made both fine cloth and coarse, which I will wear without getting tired of it. (葛之覃兮，施於中谷；維葉莫莫。是刈是濩，為絺為綌，服之無斁。) ⁶

This chapter still describes the girl in her parents' home, and the specific manifestation of her virtue, diligence and frugality. Because of her efforts to weave we can realise that the girl is diligent and good at basic female work. Besides, because all the clothes are made by herself, she cherishes the life of objects and cannot bear to throw them away at will, from which we can realise her frugality.

Chen Fuliang said,

Those who experiences the hard of farming, then he will feel grateful when he eats. Those who experiences the hard of weaving, then he will feel grateful when he wears. Because he does those things himself, he cherishes them and not bear to throw them away. (知稼穡之勤者，飲食則念勞功；知絲麻之勤者，衣服則思女功。親執其勞，所以心誠愛而不忍棄也。) ⁷

As the saying goes, 'Gratitude comes from labour' (習勞知感恩). Because we were born in an era of material prosperity, and many of us are accustomed to a comfortable life. Without experiencing these labours ourselves, it is difficult to be truly grateful for the diligent people behind us.

2.3 The explanation for the last chapter

⁶ James Legge, *The She King*, p6-7.

⁷ Pei Puxian 裴普賢, *shijing pingzhu duben* 詩經評註讀本 (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 2016), p8.

The last chapter talks about the matron teaches the girl how to manage a family. After getting married, the girl still maintains the virtue of diligence, frugality and filiality, so she has a very happy marriage life. Then she goes back to her parents' home for a visit.

'I have told the matron, who will announce that I am going to see my parents.' (言告師氏，言告言歸。) ⁸ Zheng xuan annotated that,

In ancient times, the matron teaches girls feminine virtue, feminine speech, feminine appearance and manner, and feminine work...The character *gui* (歸) for woman means 'getting married' (嫁). Besides, the meaning of sentence 'I have told the matron' is that I report details in my life to the matron and matron teaches me the principle of marriage. (古者女師教以婦德、婦言、婦容、婦功。……婦人謂嫁曰歸。箋云：我告師氏者，我見教告於女師也，教告我以適人之道。)

The matron refers to ancient female teachers who teaches girls all aspects of knowledge from their virtue, work to how to deal with people. This is similar to the modern girls schools. However, the focus of ancient Chinese women is taking care of their families, so the matron also pays much attention to the principle of marriage and methods of running a family.

'I will wash my private clothes clean, And I will rinse my robes. Which need to be rinsed, and which do not? I am going back to visit my parents.' (薄汙我私，薄澣我衣。害浣害否，歸寧父母。) ⁹ At that time, the woman has married. She has private clothes and robes which should be wear in rites for memorizing ancestors and major occasions. She understands everything in family clearly, even small things like washing she still do it prudently. Therefore, we can realize that she keeps the good virtue, and manage family very well. What she does naturally get the trust of parents-

⁸ James Legge, *The She King*, p7.

⁹ James Legge, *The She King*, p6-7.

in-law and cherishing of husband, which is her parents' biggest wish. Then she can go back parents' home to be filial to her parents, resting their mind.

2.4 The brief discussion on *Getan*

The poem consists of three chapters, and each chapter contains six sentences. *Shi xiaoxu* (詩小序) says,

the poem of *Getan* describes the root of virtue for women. When she is a girl and in parents' home, she concentrates on female works, doing everything herself, being diligent and frugal, wearing fine cloth and coarse without tired and respecting her teacher. Therefore, she can go back parent's home to visit them. Those can influence others in the world. (葛覃，后妃之本也。后妃在父母家，則志在於女功之事，躬儉節用，服澣濯之衣，尊敬師傅，則可以歸安父母，化天下以婦道也。)¹⁰

The poem shows the traditional Chinese feminine virtue, filiality, respect, diligence and frugality. Her virtue not only makes family in happiness, but also she becomes a good role model for others.

3. The illumination of traditional feminine virtue to modern society

The virtue of this ancient Chinese woman is still of practical significance for today's times. I will discuss their illumination to modern society from two aspects.

3.1 Filiality and respect

The most important things for a person's achievement is virtue. The root of virtue is filiality and respect. The woman in the poem *Getan* does not change the two characters whether before or after marrying.

When she is a girl, she is diligent to work, and cherish the clothes. After marriage, she takes good care of her parents-in-law, makes family in order, never forget parent's virtue and still go back to visit them even she has already got married. From which we

¹⁰ Mao Heng 毛亨, Annotated by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 & Kong Yingda 孔穎達, Maoshi zhengyi 毛詩正義 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), p30.

can realise her 'filiality'. When she is in parent's home, she respects her teacher (the matron) and obeys the teacher's teaching. Even after marriage, she still remembers what teacher says and makes it into practice, so the family is in harmony and order. She does not change her virtue for changes in wealth and status. She does not give up her aspiration over times. From which we can realise her 'respect'.

Modern women have to face the choice between taking care of their family and personal career. However, in traditional Western countries, women still attach great importance to the role played in the family. For example, in the United Kingdom, many middle-class mothers raise, educate their children and do housework full-time at home.¹¹ In Germany, before their children are three years old, two-thirds of mothers choose to stay at home and teach their children. More than ninety percent of women work part-time. Even after their children are fifteen years old, more than two-thirds stay part-time.¹² Because a good environment is vital to the growth and character formation of a person. The most important teacher for child before eighteen years old is his mother.

3.2 Diligence and frugality

Nowadays we live in an abundant material conditions, the good virtues of diligence and frugality are gradually neglected. This is what we need to reflect. Only by maintaining the good virtues can the family traditions continue. Therefore, Zhu Xi said:

The woman is in high social status still diligent. She is wealthy still frugal. Even if she has grown up still not neglect teacher's teaching. Although she has

¹¹ John Bingham(2014), '*Middle class mothers deserting workplace to care for children*', <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/10608528/Middle-class-mothers-deserting-workplace-to-care-for-children-Government-study-shows.html>, accessed in 3 December 2020.

¹² Katinka Barysch(2014), '*Why do so few German mothers go back to work?*' <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2014/04/german-women-feel-need-choose-kids-career/>, accessed in 3 December 2020.

got married still not weaken filiality to parents. This is the reason why she has great virtue and does what people cannot do.’ (然於此可以見其已貴而能勤，已富而能儉，已長而敬不弛於師傅，已嫁而孝不衰於父母，是皆德之厚而人所難也。) ¹³

Modern society advocates equality between men and women, and each could be independent in education, work, politics, and even economy. But in real family life, family affairs, relative gathering, and caring and educating children are all trivial things in life. All aspects in life require money such as food, accommodation, education, medical care, and festival activities. It needs great wisdom to understand how to allocate family rationally expenses cost and the orderly operation the family. Therefore, the traditional family model, wife takes care of the house and husband the outside, will make families more orderly. For example, the traditional family concepts in the United Kingdom and Germany still emphasize the difference in the division of labour between husband and wife. ¹⁴

4. Conclusion

Ancient sages through inheriting laws of nature teaching us that we should imitate the heavens and the earth. Men should imitate the endless renewal of heaven, working hard and cultivating themselves consistently. Women should imitate earth's tolerance of all things, owning the broad mind.

The virtue of wife is the cornerstone of a good family. Family harmony can lead to social stability and the peace in the world. The filiality, respect, diligence and frugality of traditional feminine virtues is the constant truth beyond time and space,

¹³ Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Shiji zhuan 詩集傳* (Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 2019), p3.

¹⁴ John Bingham(2014), ‘*Middle class mothers deserting workplace to care for children*’, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/10608528/Middle-class-mothers-deserting-workplace-to-care-for-children-Government-study-shows.html>, accessed in 3 December 2020.

which can benefit both the ancients and the modern people. If we can understand ancient people's purpose and behaviours, and sincerely implement them in life. We will naturally achieve a happy family, and even affect the society and the country.

This is all for my presentation. Any feedback and suggestion would be appreciated. Thank you very much!

5. Bibliography

Book

James Legge, *The Chinese Classics IV: The She King* (Shanghai: Huadong Shifan University Press, 2011), p6-7.

Mao Heng 毛亨, Annotated by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 & Kong Yingda 孔穎達, *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000).

Pei Puxian 裴普賢, *shijing pingzhu duben* 詩經評註讀本 (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 2016).

Zhang Jing 張敬, *Lienv zhuan jinzhujinyi* 列女傳今註今譯 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1994).

Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Shiji zhuan* 詩集傳 (Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 2019).

Website

Office for National Statistics, '*Divorces in England and Wales*'
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/divorce/datasets/divorcesinenglandandwales>, accessed in 3 December 2020.

John Bingham(2014), '*Middle class mothers deserting workplace to care for children*', <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/10608528/Middle-class-mothers-deserting-workplace-to-care-for-children-Government-study-shows.html>, accessed in 3 December 2020.

Katinka Barysch(2014), '*Why do so few German mothers go back to work?*'
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2014/04/german-women-feel-need-choose-kids-career/>, accessed in 3 December 2020.