

# *A Study of the Effects of Family Precepts, Rules and Ethics on Children's Education During the Tang Dynasty*

Jin Yingkun\*

Capital Normal University

**Abstract:** From the perspectives of the prosperity of the Sui and Tang dynasties, the rise and fall of the aristocrats and the prevalence of the imperial examination, this paper studies the impact of family precepts, rules, and ethics on children's education. I believe that an important feature of family precepts in the Tang Dynasty was the development of the cultural tradition of poetry and literature study within the family, which promoted virtues like loyalty, filial piety, diligence, frugality and modesty and had a profound influence on future generations. The rise and fall of Tang Dynasty families was closely related to family precepts, rules, ethics, and learning. Famous and respectable families often regarded these traits as important means to maintain the family's status, which objectively promoted the development of family scholarship and the importance of children's education in the Tang Dynasty. The concept of learning as a "carry-on treasure" has become a common belief among scholars and has played a positive role in educating Chinese society, enriching our culture, and keeping society in order.

**Keywords:** Tang Dynasty, family ethics, family precepts, family rules, family learning, children's education

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.19873/j.cnki.2096-0212.2020.06.005>

---

\* Jin Yingkun, School of History, Capital Normal University.

This article is funded by the National Social Science Fund of China Key Project "Research on Culture and History of Children's Education in China (16ZDA121)" and Beijing Municipal Great Wall Scholar Cultivation Plan "Research on Culture of Children's Education in the Sui and Tang Dynasties and Five Dynasties Period (CIT&TCD2018330)".

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jin Yingkun, School of History, Capital Normal University, Beijing. E-mail: ykjin2000@163.com.

**F**amily precepts, rules, and ethics are mutually inclusive and are comprised of the cultural factors of each family and each clan from different perspectives and at different levels. I once defined “family precepts” (Jin, 2018) and here amend my definition, “Family precepts are the essence and unique features of traditional Chinese culture and contain behavioral norms regarding aspects such as daily life, treatment of other things and people, learning and careers devised for adherence by a clan by relatively well-read and authoritative clan members based on summarizations of the successful experiences and lessons of ancestors in combination with mainstream values and viewpoints.” Family rules refer to rules of family governance that families and clans form over generations, and includes a certain degree of mandatory and punitive rules, but could also refer to specific punitive measures and tools applied by authoritative seniors to other members of the family or clan such as offspring or servants. Family ethics or clan ethics indicate the ethics that govern members of a family or clan in their routine behaviors, treatment of others and things, attitudes toward learning, characteristics, style and other unique qualities formed and passed down from generation to generation after being honed by family precepts and supplemented by observation of family rules (Jin, 2019). Although the three aspects vary in focus and function, they are all crucial pillars and unique features in the governance and creation of prominent families and clans, as well as vital methods to safeguard the reputation and prosperity of families and clans.

The Tang Dynasty had an aristocratic society, and the rise and fall of the aristocrats hinged on the family precepts, rules, and ethics of famed aristocratic clans. Cui Youfu, the chancellor of the Tang Dynasty said, “The virtue of a capable leader originates from enlightenment through education, and educational enlightenment begins in the family and extends to the whole state, making this a matter of great significance” (Dong, 1983). Obviously, enlightenment through education at the familial level, as in family precepts, plays an instrumental role in enlightenment through education at the societal level and in state governance because it affects the virtue of the sovereign and the rise and fall of the family. Therefore, family ethics, education and learning were extremely important in ancient China, and their most central content and starting points were the children.

Although family ethics and precepts are hot topics of debate in both society and academia, and there are copious articles on the subject matter, few offer true insights that can address related problems. Papers such as *Analysis of the Social Value of Ancient Chinese Family Precepts* (Wang, 2006), *Research on Tang Dynasty Family Precepts* (Chen, 2004) and *Discussion on the Culture of Tang Dynasty Family Precepts and Their Literary Significance* (Zhao, 2010) provide novel insights at different levels and expound on Tang Dynasty family precepts and their social values and relationships with literati and officialdom. I previously published a short piece titled *Tang Dynasty Family Precepts, Family Ethics, Family Rules and Educational Enlightenment of Society* (Jin, 2018), which briefly recapped the relationships between family precepts, ethics, rules and social changes, but is rather limited due to length requirements. Thus, upon the basis of this previous paper, this paper adopts perspectives such as the prosperity of the Sui and Tang dynasties, the rise and fall of aristocrats and the prevalence of the imperial examination system to analyze the formation and inheritance of family precepts, ethics and rules in the Tang Dynasty Chinese aristocratic clans, with a focus on discussing their

impact on children's education, and amends and supplements relevant content and viewpoints.

### Family Precepts, Rules, Ethics and Children's Education

The formation and maintaining of aristocratic clans in the Tang Dynasty was not only critical to ensuring high-ranking jobs and huge salaries for future generations, but also “the implementation of family learning, rites and other features that distinguish one clan from another” (Jin, 2018). Tang Dynasty aristocratic families in general stressed academic performance, virtues, family learning and family ethics (Qian, 1963) in order to educate offspring to ensure the continued prosperity of the clan. Therefore, major Tang Dynasty aristocratic clans summarized the ancestral experience of success and social consensus, formulated family precepts and rules, inherited and passed down family learning, and fostered sound learning habits and long term aspirations in children so that they could carry forward the family ethics generally characterized by “graceful family ethics and normative political behaviors” (Dong, 1983).

Family precepts rules, and ethics ascended to the limelight during the Sui and Tang dynasties and influenced children the most, especially in the Tang Dynasty. Intellectual and educator Yan Zhitui witnessed the affluence and doom of the major clans in the Northern and Southern dynasties period, which he summed up as “memories of those days would never fade” (Wang, 1993). Learning from those lessons, he composed *Yanshi Jiaxun* (Admonitions for the Yan Clan) during the end of the Kaihuang era (AD 581– AD 600) of Emperor Wen of the Sui Dynasty, which elevated the norm of emphasis on family precepts among the dominant clans and families to a new height. After the advent of the Tang Dynasty, the composition of family precepts among prestigious aristocratic clans and families rose to new levels. For instance, Wang Fangqing, offspring of Wang Xizhi (Sage of Calligraphy), also a chancellor during the Zhou Dynasty (AD 690– AD 705), composed *Wangshi Xunjie* (The Instructions and Precepts for the Wang Clan) and *Youti Lu* (Records of Brotherly Love) as norms for his future generations. Huangfu Qi in the middle Tang Dynasty wrote *Jia Xun* (Family Precepts) totaling some thousand Chinese characters, which was praised by Tang Dynasty intellectual Liang Su as in “fame is a focus of public” (Liang, 2000).<sup>①</sup> Another clan renowned for its strict and just family rules was that of Liu Ziwen of Hedong, with *Jie Zisun* (Instructions for Offsprings) and *Jia Xun* by his great grandchild Liu Pin being the most well-known. There were also family precepts for females, including *Nü Lunyu* (Analects of Females) and *Cuishi Xunnü Wen* (Writings on Precepts for Females of Master Cui).

Following the decline of the aristocratic clans, a new format of family precepts emerged during the middle and later portions of the Tang Dynasty, which were geared toward society instead of a specific clan. For instance, *Taigong Jiajiao* (Family Disciplines of the Grand Duke) and *Wuwang Jiajiao* (Family Disciplines of King Wu of the Zhou Dynasty), titled after luminaries of the past, collected famous sayings, epigrams and classic adages, and compiled them into documents that were to be taught to children in the world. Such documents include *Biancai Jiajiao* (Family Disciplines of Eloquence) and *Xinji Yanfu Jiajiao*

① Su Gui, once a chancellor during the reign of Emperor Zhongzong of Tang Dynasty.

(New Collection of Family Disciplines of the Strict Father) in written texts found in Dunhuang. The composition of these family precepts followed the twilight of the aristocratic clans of the Tang Dynasty and the Five Dynasties period, as well as the spread of culture toward the lower tier of society. Such family precepts satisfied demands that grew among common families, which propelled “family precepts” for specific families as represented by examples such as *Yanshi Jiaxun* to shift toward “family precept” that suited the needs of all families like the *Xinji Yanfu Jiajiao*.

Family precepts prevailed during the Tang Dynasty, and even the emperors, empresses and princes were inclined to compose their own precepts to instruct and educate their posterity. *Di Fan* (Paragon for Emperor) by Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty and *Tian Xun* (Heavenly Instructions) by Emperor Gaozong of Tang were used to educate and instruct princes, and Wu Zetian wrote *Zishu Yaolu* (Key Records of Zishu), *Qinggong Jiyao* (Key Points about the Green Palace), *Shaoyang Zhengfan* (Correct Models for Young Men), *Chen Gui* (Development Trajectory of Officials) and *Bailiao Xinjie* (New Instructions for Hundred Officials) to educate and instruct imperial consorts, princes, kings and officials, while Prince Zhanghuai composed *Chungong Yaolu* (Key Records of the Spring Palace), *Junchen Xiangfa Qishi* (Affairs Started Mutually between Ruler and Ministers) and *Xiushen Yaolu* (Key Records for Improving Oneself), among numerous other examples. These family precepts and instructions were all written by emperors, empresses, and princes to educate and instruct kings and posterity from their clans.

Outstanding family precepts were only mandatory for the creation of sound family ethics in a famed aristocratic clan, but strict and impartial family rules were also necessary to enforce these instructions. For instance, Tang Dynasty politician Su Ting was a genius that could “recite several thousand characters each day and could memorize texts with divine accuracy,” his father Su Gui was known for “strict and rigorous instructions” and Su Ting even had to wear plain clothes and lie under the bed to read, and he would be hit by a stick once he stretched out his neck (Zheng, 1994). The stringent family rules pushed Su Ting to perform well academically, who excelled in the imperial examination and eventually rose to chancellorship like his father, as summed up in the saying “both the father and the son are privy councilors in the imperial palace, which is an honorable legend of the time” (Liu, 1975). During the middle of the Kaiyuan era under the reign of Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty, chancellor Han Xiu was famous for “educating his son with the most strict family precepts” (Ouyang, 1975), and under the influence of his father, Han Xiu’s son Han Huang was noted as “a son of a chancellor but lived frugally, dressed plainly and would only get new clothes every ten years” (Ouyang, 1975). Thereafter, Mu Ning was also esteemed for “strict family rules, who served his elder sister with utmost respect.” During the Zhengyuan era under the reign of Emperor Dezong of Tang, a common belief was that “the Han and Mu families are exemplars of strict upbringing” (Ouyang, 1975), which is corroborated by the saying “for literati and officialdom to speak about family rules, the Mu family reigns supreme” (Liu, 1975). Mu Ning was known for “impartial and strict family rules,” and his sons Mu Zan, Mu Zhi and others were said to be “brothers respond like servants when commanded, and Mu Zan was the most resounding exemplar of filial obedience” (Liu, 1975).

Only with strict and impartial family rules could a family remain in harmony and sustainable

affluence. For example, Minister of Justice Liu Dewei had a harmonious family, and he was known to be forthright and generous, especially praised for assisting and sharing his wealth with the poorer and weaker members of his clan. Meanwhile, his son lived with them amiably, and there were more than two hundred in the household and everyone coexisted happily (Liu, 1975). Another example is Cui Bin of Boling, whose father Cui Chui lived in a household with three generations of the family, and everyone cooked together and lived together joyfully” (Ouyang, 1975). Cui Bin excelled at the imperial examination and eventually became a chancellor, and his younger brothers Cui Yan, Cui Shan and Cui Dan were all top-three performers in the imperial examination, with Cui Dan also earning eminence as a chancellor. Thus, it was recorded that “four generations of the Cui clan lived together, and three of the six brothers held positions as high-ranking as third-tier officials. Cui Yan, Cui Shan and Cui Dan were appointed as Assistant Minister of Ceremony on five occasions and twice Assistant Minister of Official Personnel Affairs. Such feats were never replicated by any other clan in the Tang Dynasty. The brothers lived together in a humble abode in Guangdeli, and upon hearing this news Emperor Xuanzong exclaimed, “Cui Dan shows filial obedience and could be an exemplar of rules for aristocratic clans.” Thus, the shrine was named “Dexing Hall.” Thereafter, the citizens of Jingzhao called the place “Dexingshe”, a venue or organization for a “moral and ethical star” (Ouyang, 1975). The ultimate purpose was to maintain an aristocratic family and “live together through generations from children to grandchildren, so that no one deviates from the family” (Dong, 1983).

The clan of Liu Gongchuo from Jingzhao (now Xi’an) in the middle and late Tang Dynasty was well-known for strict and just family rules, employing some of the most stringent means to compel posterity to study diligently day and night in order to excel in the imperial examination for the sake of positions and achievements. Liu Ziwen was also famous for rigorous and impartial family rules, and in order to educate offspring like Liu Gongchuo, Liu Gongquan and Liu Gongliang, he combined bitter materials such as the shrubby sophora, the Chinese goldthread and the galls of bear to make pills, which Liu Gongchuo, Liu Gongquan and others were required to hold in their mouths while they studied at night so they could stay awake, stay sharp and “fuel their diligence.”<sup>①</sup> Liu Gongchuo carried on the family rules of his father as characterized by “being prudent and cautious and following rites and rules,” who “governed his family rigorously and offspring all adhered to instructions,” including education of his son Liu Zhongying. Subsequently, Niu Sengru, chancellor of the Tang Dynasty, once praised Liu Zhongying for his sound family schooling, saying, “No one could achieve this but an experienced teacher” (Liu, 1975). Liu Zhongying followed in his father’s footsteps in the application of exemplary family rules, and “observed rites and rules himself,” lived a frugal life, read all the time, “went home to copy ancient texts regardless of day or night” (Liu, 1975). His son Liu Pin also said that his family “shall hold awe and veneration and not abuse their privilege,” and also adhered to the instructions of his ancestors and underscored “speaking and discussing family rules” (Liu, 1975). Through inheritance over generations, the Liu clan of Jingzhao

① In *Nanbu Xinshu* (New Book of the South) by Qian Yi of the Song Dynasty, it was written, “The rules of Liu Ziwen’s family included pills made from bitter materials such as the shrubby sophora, the Chinese goldthread and the galls of bear, which posterity were required to hold in their mouths while they studied at night so they could stay awake, stay sharp and fuel their diligence.” Zhonghua Book Company, 2002 edition, p. 50.



became known for their “widespread presence in the court through learning rules and rites” and “to speak about family rules is to speak about the Liu clan” (Liu, 1975). Numerous luminaries emerged from the Liu clan due to such strict family ethics, including ministerial and cultural elites like Liu Gongchuo, Liu Gongquan, Liu Zhongying and Liu Can, all of whom probably benefited tremendously from the rigors of the Liu clan’s family rules, family ethics and family learning since their youth.

Exemplary family precepts and strict family rules ultimately foster sound family ethics, and verbal instructions and teaching via example from seniors had a huge impact on the education of the children. Thus, the Tang Dynasty aristocratic families and clans always raised the formulation of family precepts and family rules to a level summed up as “when family rules are first in place, people can then be well nurtured” (Ouyang, 1975). This could also be considered self-imposed disciplines and warnings for the posterity in high-ranking families. For young members of these families, it was necessary to “train before others so as to stand out” and to remain vigilant against the mentality of “pride because of prominent family background, and jealousy from others when the clan is mighty” (Ouyang, 1975). Therefore, the formulation of family precepts and family rules, as well as the development of family ethics, were particularly crucial for the members of the posterity in aristocratic clans.

Family ethics, family rules and family learning were always impacting an individual subconsciously, almost from birth, and such an impact lasted a lifetime. While recalling instructions from his uncle from his younger days, Li Shangyin, a late Tang Dynasty poet, said, “When wind breaks the wave, the rules of yesterday shall not be forgotten; the southern alley is famous, and the hopes of this life are extinguished” (Li, 1988). Even with time and experience, he would always bear in mind the instructions from his elders and the family rules of the Li clan.

### **Impact of Family Precepts on Children’s Education in the Tang Dynasty**

The content of Tang Dynasty family precepts stressed loyalty, filial obedience, virtuous behavior and encouragement for learning, which were closely related to the children’s education. Liu Pin in the late Tang Dynasty spoke about his family precepts as such, “Man who walks the path, virtuous actions and literary learning are like trunks and roots of a tree, integrity and righteousness are like branches and leaves...observe filial piety, benevolence, love for brothers and friends, loyalty, trustworthiness, honesty, frugal consumption for every single day” (Ouyang, 1975). Based on this division, the family precepts of the late Tang Dynasty focused on virtuous actions and literary learning as the main staple, supported by integrity and righteousness, and further supplemented by filial piety, benevolence, love for brothers and friends, loyalty, trustworthiness and honesty, among other elements. Yet, in terms of the Tang Dynasty as a whole, it is still necessary to discuss specific circumstances. Due to changes over time and the rise and fall of various clans, family precepts in different stages in the Tang Dynasty varied, but did not stray far from aspects such as loyalty, filial piety, virtuous behavior, literary learning, poetry and classics, frugality, humility, politeness and courtesy, trustworthiness and faithfulness. In general, family precepts of the Tang Dynasty have the following features.

First, the Tang Dynasty family precepts revolved around loyalty and filial piety and underlined education on virtuous behaviors. In ancient China, the family precepts highlighted the education of children about “loyalty and filial piety,” which were deemed the underlying principle for cultivating the personal attributes and qualities of youngsters. Confucius said, “Utmost filial piety to parents and love for brothers provide insights and wisdom, and lights illuminate across the world” (Li, 1999), which confirmed filial piety to parents and love for brothers as the top priority in the field of moral cultivation. In the *Classic of Filial Piety*, a Confucian classic treatise, it is written that “In human conduct there is nothing more important than family reverence” (Li, 1999), placing filial piety before all else among the one hundred listed. Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty also said, “All endeavors start with filial piety and it is the priority...it is more important than any other rites or virtues, and it determines one’s grace or disgrace” (Song, 2008). This further positioned “filial piety” as the “basis for all endeavors.” The “Meng Shu” (Children Enlightenment Books) series of classic texts in the Tang Dynasty even deemed education on the ways of filial piety a significant area of content. It was written in the *Taigong Jiajiao* (Family Precept of Taigong), one of such “Meng Shu” classic texts of the Tang Dynasty, “Remain loyal to all matters of one’s lord, remain filial to all matters of one’s father. Learn about the rites and ask for education if one does not know...filial respect for one’s father shall be thought of every morning and carried out all day. Know when he is hungry and when he is thirsty, know when he is warm and when he is cold. Share his worries and joys. If one’s parent is sick, one should not have any appetite for a feast, seek fulfillment from eating, seek satisfaction when hungry, or feel happy upon hearing good news, happy upon hearing celebration, train one’s body or tidy one’s attire, because these are easily remedied once parents have recovered”. Using easily understood lexicons and rhythmic and rhyming sentences, central thoughts on loyalty and filial piety from the *Classics of Filial Piety* were highly condensed in order to simplify learning for children and the application of such knowledge in daily life and behavior.

“Serve father and observe filial piety” is one of the most common family precepts of the Tang Dynasty. Many aristocratic clans consider “loyalty and filial piety” the core elements in their family precepts. Mu Ning composed his family precepts and instructed his sons, “People with high morals will satisfy their parents’ aspirations” (Ouyang, 1975). Mu Ning often instructed his four sons to “play ritual music, carry out duties of loyalty and filial piety, right your reputation, observe proper social order,” and considered loyalty and filial piety, ritual music, reputation and proper social order as the key content of his family precepts. When “speaking about and discussing family rules,” Liu Pin declared the need to “observe filial piety and brotherly love as the foundation of manhood, and remaining respectful and soft-spoken as the basis” (Liu, 1975), and to combine loyalty, filial piety and integrity as normality, believing that “all revered clans and families were all founded from respect for elders, loyalty, filial piety, diligence and frugality” (Ouyang, 1975).

Second, Tang Dynasty precepts initiated the Chinese cultural tradition of “poetry and classics to be passed on within the family.” Confucius once instructed his son Kong Li that “if you do not study the rituals, you will find yourself at a loss how to paddle your own canoe” and “if you do not study the *Songs*, you will find yourself at a loss in conversation” (Yang, 1958, p. 176), which eventually became

a venerated “instruction from one’s father.” Thereafter, relying on the *Songs* and the rituals to establish oneself in society and pass on such elements from generation to generation became a prominent feature of Chinese family precepts. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, the imperial examination system eradicated the unfairness inherent in the “candidates for officials only selected from families of second tier or above” system of the Wei and Jin dynasties, replacing this past mechanism with “officials selected based on literary prowess.” What followed was the shift from “passing on poetry and rites” to “passing on poetry and classics,” which then became the most prominent signature of the family precepts of the Tang Dynasty. Following the decline of the aristocratic clans of the Tang Dynasty, it was difficult for reputation and wealth to be held and handed down perpetually, and people began to realize that being well-read was the “treasure that would stay with you,” with the realization also finding its way into family precepts. Yan Zhitui witnessed the social unrest of the Northern and Southern dynasties period, and earnestly recognized that “instead of accumulating wealth in monetary assets, it is better to accumulate wealth in skills and knowledge” (Wang, 1993), and that “reading and learning knowledge,” “open the eyes and mind of oneself, which is conducive to proper behaviors” (Wang, 1993). Therefore, he educated and instructed his posterity to focus on academics, learn as early as possible because “children who learn are like the rays of the rising sun” (Wang, 1993), and practice lifelong learning in order to prepare oneself for a position in the government court. Wang Fanzhi, a local Dunhuang poet from the early stage of the Tang Dynasty, felt the same way and wrote in one poem “do not solely think about how to order a child around, instead teach him or her to learn first and foremost,” as in prioritizing learning as the number one task in educating posterity, and advocating that “a man who has no skill or knowledge can not take a stand in the society” (Wang, 1991). During the Tianbao era during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty, purportedly in the words of the emperor, it was stated in the *Xinhe Qianwen Huangdi Ganci* (“New Compilation of the Words of Emperors”) that “a house full of gold might not hold any actual treasure” (Zhang, 2006). This is actually associated with the “officials selected based on literary prowess” mentality of the imperial examination system of the Tang Dynasty, as well as the Ministry of Official Affairs and Appointment’s emphasis on political and literary abilities. After Kaiyuan and Tianbao eras, following the sovereign’s further reinforcement in Emperor Xuanzong’s “stop warfare, encourage education” policy, the “generals after warfare to be instated as ministers” system since the Qin and Han dynasties was abolished, and it became difficult to rely solely on feats on the battlefield for a career in the imperial court. The “officials selected based on literary prowess” orientation of the imperial examination system further solidified the chances for “poem readers” to rise in the ranks of the government court, which directly changed the way aspiring scholars thought about children’s education. For example, Zhao Wugai from Hexi region, who lost his father in childhood, was good at martial arts and hunting, but his mother melancholically said, “You do not study, but occupy yourself with hunting all day. Alas, I have no hope for the future.” Zhao Wugai was touched and thus dedicated himself to studying. After several years, he was well versed in poem and history and passed the imperial examination (Liu, 1984).

The belief that education and knowledge equated to good reputation, good remuneration and other benefits became increasingly prevalent in the Tang Dynasty family precepts. In the *Xue Xing Zhang* (On



Learning and Conduct) chapter of the *Bai Xing Zhang* (One Hundred Behaviors), Du Zhenglun, chancellor in the Tang Dynasty once wrote, “People might look different but none could establish themselves in society without learning. The source of all endeavors is established upon learning, and even good reputation and promising remuneration are hidden within” (Deng, 1985). Following reforms in the official election system in the Tang Dynasty and the implementation of the imperial examination, relying on poetry, classics and knowledge to earn a good reputation and good remuneration gradually became the method of choice among aspiring scholars. After the mid- and late-Tang, poetry lines and maxims that advocated studying such as “knowledge of a man is the treasures that will stay with him wherever and whenever” and “education is the treasure that will stay with one wherever and whenever, as with high-ranking officials and chancellors in the imperial court”. Relying on education to garner repute and high pay eventually formed the concept of the passing of poetry and classics from generation to generation, with which people taught and trained their children. Therefore, many family precepts and family learning also considered the mentality of “accumulating monetary wealth is not as important as learning knowledge” as key content. It was written in the *Taigong Jiajiao*, “Accumulating ten million riches is not as important as thoroughly understanding one classic”, clearly declaring to and instructing posterity that monetary wealth is not as sustainable as classic texts. Han Yu instructed his posterity as such, “Although gold and jade are great treasures, such wealth is hard to store; knowledge is contained within oneself, and could always be put to use anytime and anywhere” (Peng, 1960). Gold, jade and other physical asset were no longer adequate to secure the perennial privilege of posterity, and thus “knowledge kept within oneself” was the preferred form of “asset” among aspiring individuals. Du Mu instructed his posterity, “Read ten texts a day, read a box of texts a month. Imperial court is governed with words, and education will open career paths in the government” (Peng, 1960), which obviously connects education with careers in the government.

After Kaiyuan and Tianbao eras, scholars generally considered reliance on knowledge about poetry and texts for entrance into the government, then ascension into higher echelons of society and acquisition of reputation and prestige as the most effective pathway to realize one’s value. Therefore, the majority of scholars positioned “education and political affairs” as the most critical family precept and family rule (Quan, 2008) needed to ensure that posterity would prioritize education and political affairs. In *Zongwu Shengri* (Zongwu’s Birthday), a poem for his son, Du Fu, the “Poet Sage” advised, “Poetry is the business of our family, but people regard it as the emotional bond of me and my father. Learn *Zhaoming Selected Works* thoroughly, and refrain from seeking ornamental clothes to entertain your parents” (Du, 1979), mandating posterity to emphasize poetry, classics and articles as the main staples in life, to diligently learn poems, *fu* poetry (rhapsody) and the *Zhaoming Selected Works* and refrain from riches like ornamental clothes. Han Yu, another revered literati, came from a family of low-ranking officials with no prestigious heritage to boast about. He was orphaned at a young age but “studiously learned Confucian classics since youth,” relied on his prowess with poems and *fu* poetry (rhapsody) to gain a reputation and worked his way up the ladder to a ministerial position, becoming one of the most influential figures in the literary circle of the middle and late Tang Dynasty (Liu, 1975). Therefore, Han Yu instructed his son to read classics and learn poetry in earnest, “The ability of a person depends on the poetry and classics in reserve.

Only by reading poetry and classics frequently will one succeed, and if one does not learn frequently then one will remain ignorant.” Han Yu even believed that individuals were not too different from one another in the early parts of life, but development into “a pig or a dragon” was largely dependent upon whether one was fluent with poetry and classics (Peng, 1960). This is a bit of a harsh comment, but acute and insightful. Although Han Fu did not live up to Han Yu’s expectation and performed somewhat sub-par, his brother Han Chang earned his ribbons as one of the top three in the imperial examination, a testament to the incredible success of Han Yu’s teaching. Another instance is Tang scholar and official Yuan Zhen, who taught his posterity that he was born from a poor family, because ancestors left instructions not permitting possession of property and wealth to avoid distracting posterity, advocated posterity to “respect the *Classics of Poetry* and *Book of Documents* to seek prosperity” at a young age (Yuan, 1982), cautioned the necessity to “strive at all cost and never give up,” with genuine intention to teach and guide posterity. Another example is Li Hua, who educated his grandson Li Cui to “read *Classics of Poetry*, *Book of Rites*, *Analects of Confucius* and *Classics of Filial Piety* as the most important of all matters” (Dong, 1983). Du Mu wrote a poem stating “keep oneself busy with reading,” “if you have gold and jade, your posterity would not be able to keep hold of them” and “what to do with a house filled with money if the house was torn down” to instruct his posterity (Peng, 1960), believing that only with education could one and one’s family stay affluent for generations, while those with no knowledge were doomed to poverty. The “officials selected based on literary prowess” and “priority on poems and *fu* poetry (rhapsody)” that prevailed in the imperial examination and ministries of the mid- and late-Tang government (Wang, 1995), to be ranked a top-performing scholar was deemed the “best career,” top-performing scholars constituted the talent pool for chancellors, and learning poetry and classics logically became the most effective stepping stone for those born in common families to open gateways to the echelons of government officials. Thus, aristocratic clans from Han Yu and Yuan Zhen to Du Mu, who all rose to fame through imperial examinations, had personally experienced the difficulty in safeguarding monetary assets and prestige, and they held that only through education could one “open up career paths in the government,” which would naturally be followed by physical wealth.

Since the reign of Empress Wu Zetian, in the Tang Dynasty “officials all reached their position through literature” (Du, 1988). After the Kaiyuan era, “the path to officialdom is spearheaded by literature” (Dugu, 1993) and “it is a shame for anyone who do not understand the literature written by a scholar” (Lian, 2000). The mentality that “father teaches son, elder brother teaches younger brother, and everyone studied scriptures, books and poems as they considered the imperial examination the premier career” and “children five feet tall feel ashamed if they cannot recite poems” swept across society (Du, 1988). Against such a backdrop, the families of scholars and peasants obviously came to consider that “poetry and classics to be passed on within the family” was particularly important. Furthermore, poetry and classics gradually became the most reliable path through which those born from poor families could reach fame and affluence, and the dream of “being born in a poor farmer’s household and emerging in the imperial court as an official” became a reality. Venerated chancellors and writers such as Zhang Jiuling and Han Yu, among numerous others, were born in poor families but leaned on poetry and classics to

achieve prominence. In the subsequent Song Dynasty, notable chancellor Wang Anshi even went so far as to clearly stipulate “reading is not expensive but reading yields ten thousand times return on investment” when instructing his posterity. Education became the most effective conduit through which those from poor families could change their fate. Ultimately, the widely held belief was that “all careers are not as prestigious as scholars,” and becoming well-read was the highest lifelong pursuit among literati and officialdom during and after the Tang and Song dynasties. The attitude that “if one does not look (and ask), how can one gain sights (official positions)” prevailed among the masses, which turned into the “poetry and classics to be passed on within the family” cultural tradition in ancient China.

Education does not distinguish between family backgrounds and all scholars had to read. Han Yu educated his posterity by saying, “Those with noble heritage and those with lowly backgrounds are held equal in front of education.” He believed that many dukes and chancellors were “born from families that plowed the fields,” and taught his posterity that “Affluence is hidden in books. The instructions in classics are fundamental precepts” (Peng, 1960), hence articles and instructions in classics are the bedrocks for becoming scholars. It was written in the *On Encouraging Learning* of the *Shiershi* (Twelve Hours) that “all males need to study and that being poor is not an excuse” (Ren, 2006). Education should not have any gender bias. It was written in the *Taigong Jiajiao*, “Rearing but not teaching a boy is no different than rearing a slave for someone else; rearing but not teaching a girl is less worthwhile than feeding a pig”. Similarly, it was written in the *Queming Shi* (Queming Poem), “If a male has no knowledge, he is no different than a donkey”. These adages might be a bit vulgar but were easily understood by country folks and reached prevalence due to changes in life, society and culture at that time.

Yet, there were only a limited number of positions in the government, so plenty of scholars were unable to capitalize on the “officials selected based on literary prowess” system. For instance, although Li Shangyin, in the late-Tang Dynasty, excelled as one of the top-three imperial examination performers, due to his role in the conflict between Niu Sengru and Li Deyu, his career in the court was derailed, and he actually instructed his posterity to “use martial force to secure their position when necessary, instead of staunchly relying on the classics (learning) alone” (Li, 2015), suggesting that giving up literary learning and taking up martial prowess was workable too.

Third, Tang Dynasty family precepts featuring content related to modesty and courtesy had a huge impact on the cultivation of morals and sentiments in children. Zhu Rengui in the Tang Dynasty, also named “Xiaoyou Xiansheng” (literally “Man of Filial Piety and Friendliness”), often instructed his posterity that, “Even if you give way to others for your whole life, in total you will take no more than an extra one hundred steps; if you give up parcels of fields to others for your whole life, in the end you will not lose the big field” (Ouyang, 1975). This aphorism conveys a simple principle to his posterity, that leading a humble and courteous life would not cost much, but instead would cultivate the commendable traits of humility and courtesy, as well as the breadth of spirit to be modest and tolerating. Some family precepts even considered courtesy and humility based on righteousness to be the foundation for establishing oneself in society and to hone one’s personal qualities. In the *Taigong Jiajiao*, one of the “Meng Shu” classic texts of the Tang Dynasty found in Dunhuang, states, “The foundation to establish oneself in

society is first and foremost humility based on righteousness...when dining with others, never be the first to taste...when encountering a senior, stand to the side and give way...to establish oneself in society, first establish oneself properly...humility is the basis for all other endeavors”). The author emphasized that the foundation of being a person is “humility based on righteousness” and that “humility is the basis for all other endeavors,” informing children that the essence of being a part of this world and interactions with others should be to uphold humility, to think by stepping into the shoes of someone else, to be considerate, and that to fulfill oneself one ought to first help others fulfill themselves, while giving an opportunity to others is in fact fulfilling oneself. Tang Dynasty family precepts also stressed “courtesy and reciprocity.” In the *Taigong Jiajiao*, it was written, “courtesy demands reciprocity, and this is what distinguishes the noble from the vulgar. After receiving a cow, return the favor with a horse. If you visit someone but the other person does not visit you in return, that is discourteous; and if someone visits you and you do not visit in return, that is also discourteous”.

Studying diligently and frugality were also crucial in the family precepts of the Tang Dynasty. Studying diligently and frugality were important and outstanding traditions in ancient China and were cornerstones that aristocratic clans relied on to establish their family ethics. The *Mian Xue* (Encouragements On Studies) in the *Yanshi Jiaxun* (Admonitions for the Yan Clan) listed many ancient paragons that exemplified diligence in study such as “use a sharp object to stab and waken oneself to continue studying when tired; threw an ax on a tree to determine if one would set out to faraway Chang’an to study, and the ax did lodge in the tree so the person did set out to faraway Chang’an to study; use snow reflection as a source of light for reading in winter; capture fireflies in a bag as a source of light for reading in summer” (Wang, 1993), among numerous other examples, to encourage posterity to study and learn industriously. Following the advancement of the Tang imperial examination system, to be ranked a top-performing scholar was deemed the “best career step,” and to learn poetry and classics logically became the most effective stepping stone to open gateways into the echelons of government officials, and was often the primary determinant of individual success or failure. Thus, Han Yu instructed his posterity that, “Only by reading poetry and classics frequently will one succeed, and if one does not learn frequently then he will remain ignorant” (Peng, 1960), and one’s level of diligence will largely decide one’s future as a chancellor or a slave. The *Taigong Jiajiao* has a summary on industriousness and studiousness, “One who farms industriously will reap bountiful harvests; one that learns studiously will rise in ranks...diligence is a priceless treasure, and learning is as valuable as the sun and moon”. Mu Ning was known for his rigorous and stringent family rules, and he demanded his posterity such as Mu Zan and Mu Zhi “to possess the diligence, dedication and critical thinking spirit of Hui Shi, Dong Zhongshu and Su Qin (alluding to the well-known tales of three hard-working intellects)” (Dong, 1983). With the combination of all three sects in one, it is not hard to imagine the strictness of the rules of the Mu family and the studious learning attitudes of the Mu children, which they became well-known for. Of course, perseverance is the key to learning. Tang Dynasty poet Du Xunhe instructed his posterity, “Diligence in youth is a major lifetime dedication, do not ever relent in your diligence as time passes by” (Peng, 1960). The key is to start learning early and young, and do not

relax as a youth because that would be a waste of time.

Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty witnessed the demise of the previous Sui sovereignty due to pride and exorbitance, so he composed *Di Fan* to warn his princes that “luxury or frugality can be chosen, and so can safety and danger” (Li, 1985), expressing the wish that his princes should live economically, and set examples of simplicity that could be followed by citizens, which would be conducive to their growth into wise leaders. Many aristocratic family precepts also stressed thriftiness and de-emphasized fame and money. Lady Zheng, the mother of the Tang Dynasty governor of western Sichuan, Li Jingrang, was noted for “strict governance of the family and instructed her offspring through leading by example.” One story goes that they came from a poor household and when they were repairing the house, they found a huge sum of treasure hidden inside a wall. Refusing to take what she did not deserve, Lady Zheng buried the treasure and cited this as an instance to teach her posterity about the principle of de-emphasized fame and money. Li Jingrang was one of the top-scorers in the imperial examination, went on to become a high-ranking official, and did become widely lauded for his honesty and frugality as was praised in the phrase, “Strict and comprehensive family ethics and orderly and systematic family rules” (Ouyang, 1975). Venerable Tang Dynasty poet and government official Bai Juyi wrote, “My family upholds honesty and simplicity as precepts for generations, my uncles and father adhere to this principle and do not dare to detract from this instruction” (Bai, 1979). Bai Juyi continued the “honesty and simplicity” precepts passed down from his ancestors, and taught his posterity to “do not worry about the house being too small, it is just a place to sleep in” (Bai, 1979) and “do not become obsessed with the pursuit of wealth, because wealth is a fire that will consume yourself” (Bai, 1979). Bai Juyi associated honesty and simplicity with abstaining from greed and instructed his posterity to refrain from devoting too much to the pursuit of fame and money. This mentality of being content was of immense significance to his posterity’s establishment in society and performance as government officials. Late-Tang Dynasty chancellor Pei Tan was known to be “simple and frugal, and when his son married Yang Shou’s daughter, Yang wanted to be presented with many items of gold and jade jewelry,” but Pei Tan believed it was “against my family rule” and refused the demand. Pei Tan governed his household with “simplicity and frugality,” and his posterity were thus reputable as “generations of honest individuals” (Ouyang, 1975).

Of course, the primary orientation in family precepts was to summarize the successful experience and lessons of ancestors, instruct posterity that it was necessary to focus on the most important issues in life in order to establish oneself in society, deal with others and events appropriately, learn and grow up, avoid risks, and minimize waste and unnecessary detours. Liu Pin advised his posterity to always remain vigilant, and that “righteousness and honesty are crucial and necessary for government officials, while vigilance and mishaps do not go hand in hand, integrity and prosperity do not coexist.” Good fortune and bad fortune, anxiety and suffering are often dependent on each other or the cause of each other, as summed up in the adage, “Fortunate life leads to pride and excessiveness, pride and excessiveness lead to misfortune.” Therefore, to ensure that one’s “clan remains prosperous for generations to come,” the key lies not in praying to deities, but “to always remain circumspect,” and listed real examples of how he witnessed the demise of aristocratic clans. Since the world is always changing, he instructed his posterity



to always live up to one's words and cherish one's credibility, while "those who only see benefits forfeit their credibility as easily and quickly as turning one's hand" (Ouyang, 1975), and these people would suffer sooner or later. He exclaimed, "People today speak too much about retributions in the future" (Ouyang, 1975). He hoped that his posterity could remain keen in observation, contemplate about realistic problems, and summarize and learn from life experiences in a timely manner, instead of relying on prayers to deities. These teachings were applied to offspring in their early years and played instrumental roles in the healthy upbringing of children. As the saying goes, "Appropriate education is necessary even at a young age." Family precepts, family rules and family ethics were crucial to children's education.

### **Impact of Family Ethics and Family Learning on Children's Education**

The biggest impact on children's education ought to have come from family ethics and family learning. Sound family precepts and family rules were beneficial to the formation of sound family ethics, while the continuation of family learning was more often than not a manifestation of family ethics. This correlates with the concept of "family education environment" so frequently mentioned today, which was of pivotal importance to children's education in ancient China. The *Taigong Jiajiao* and other classics of the "Meng Shu" often mention that "He who stays near vermilion gets stained red. He who stays near (black) ink gets stained black; plants that grow in fertile fields will naturally grow straight without being straightened; white jades will always remain white and pure. Those associated with boisterous people will flatter others, those associated with thieves will steal; those associated with fools will become fools, those associated with the wise will become wise; those associated with the benevolent will become kind, those associated with whores will become lusty." This maxim conveys how family environment determines the success or failure of education of posterity to a certain extent, and this was also the reason behind the story of "Three Moves by Mencius' Mother (in search of a better environment for her child)." For instance, in the mid-Tang Dynasty, there was a man named Wu Dan. While playing with mud and sand at the age of four or five, he made a sculpture that looked like a Taoist ceremony; While writing with an ink brush at the age of eight or nine, he wrote texts from the *Classics of Poetry*. He did not know why it happened. He studied the words of Confucius and understood the principles. When he came of age at 20, he enjoyed Taoist scripts and practiced its teachings. Those who do not grow up eating rice, with essences focused in their belly, naturally exude a worldly spirit" (Bai, 1979). When Wu Dan played with dirt as a kid, he simulated a Taoist priest performing rituals, indicating that Taoist elements were prevalent at home and at his place of residence, which directly influenced Wu Dan's upbringing, so much so that after his capping ceremony at the age of 20, he even practiced Taoism. Later, he read the *Classics of Poetry* and performed relatively well in the imperial examination. All of these occurred because he "studied the words of Confucius and understood the principles" at a young age. Sound family teaching and family ethics affected the entire family, and consequently the whole clan.

The soundness of family ethics and family learning often determined the success or failure of children's education among posterity. For instance, Cheng Zigan "followed the precepts of the court when

young, adhered to family ethics, once browsed the Five Classics (*The Book of Songs, The Book of History, The Book of Rites, The Book of Changes, and The Spring and Autumn Annals*) and read the Three Historical Books (*Records of the Historian, The Book of Han and The Book of Later Han*)” (Dong, 1983). Another instance is Zhang Zhijian from Puzhou during the early Tang, “When he was young, he and his elder brothers Zhixuan and Zhihui, and younger brothers Zhitai and Zhimo, were dedicated to reading and all performed well in the imperial exam.” The five brothers all scored high marks in the imperial exam, indicating the strictness in the family learning and upbringing in their household. Zhang Zhijian was “forthright and did not like those who advanced up the ranks by asking favors from others or that held high ranks but had no talents,” so he demanded his “posterity not to partake in the imperial exam if they did not learn the classics well” (Liu, 1975). Evidently, the Zhang brothers all performed well in the imperial exam, which was the result of strict and impartial family ethics and family learning. Sound family ethics and family learning often benefited those in the extended family and affected several generations. For instance, during the middle of the Kaiyuan era, the Lin family from Jinan, who was led by a “capable mother that was well-versed in the Five Classics and apt with words,” and after her husband was dead, she educated and instructed her sons Yanfu, Yanguo, Yanwei and Yanyun, as well as nephews Bo, Ju and Zong, all of which “were literarily proficient.” In the two decades between the Kaiyuan and Tianbao eras, the seven of them, including Yanfu and Ju, all performed well academically and were honored with great prestige” (Liu, 1975), while Gongda, the son of Xue Bo, was elected *jìnshi* (the highest level and the most difficult of imperial civil examinations). Yet another example is the accomplished family of Liu Gongchuo as mentioned before, and their achievements were attributed largely to strict and impartial rules of the Liu family, as well as the inheritance of sound family ethics from generation to generation.

Outstanding family ethics are not only conducive to maintaining sound family learning among children in aristocratic clans, but also benefitted other close relatives. For instance, Yuan Zhen was able to achieve fame due to the teaching of his mother, who came from the Zheng clan of Xingyang, one of the “five major clans” of the Sui and Tang dynasties renowned for the rigors and impartiality of family ethics. When Lady Zheng was young, she “considered filial piety to her parents a top priority, solid relationships between siblings also a top priority, and she learned these ways on her own without instructions, and her lady attributes were natural. When she was wedded to the poor Yuan family, she helped the family prosper and her ways were passed down as family precepts.” Lady Zheng married Yuan Zhen’s father Yuan Kuan, brought her family ethics to the Yuan family, and in the 25 subsequent years “she gave out instructions exclusively without the use of whips. She instructed females with a serious attitude and they were frightened so they obeyed; she said harsh words to her posterity, so they learned to be ashamed of themselves. Her efforts led to a peaceful family in which the female servants never quarreled, the children grew up well, in-laws coexisted harmoniously with each other, just as people in the old days desired. Her instructions were kind-hearted” (Bai, 1979). Even though Yuan Zhen’s father died when he was young, being in such a family environment that exuded sound family precepts and family rules from both his own family and that of his mother’s, and under the cultivation of his mother and her family, he was able to excel academically and performed well in the imperial examination, ultimately reaching eminence as one

of the Tang Dynasty's famous chancellors and literary luminaries.

The impact of family learning traditions and heritage was particularly prominent among posterity. For instance, the Yan family was not only broadly regarded as Confucianists since the Wei and Jin dynasties, but also produced a substantial number of calligraphers like Yan Tengzhi, Yan Bingzhi, Yan Qinli and Yan Zhenqing and other masters. This was probably strongly associated with an emphasis on calligraphy in the children's education during their early days in the Yan family. There were quite a few Yan youngsters who were adept in calligraphy. For instance, Yan Qinli was "young but smart, had penetrative and profound vision, dedicated to details and in particular was good at research on ancient texts." Yan Zhouqing meanwhile was "young but smart, and in particular was good at research on ancient texts, could write well with the clerical script, and was famous alongside his brother-in-law Yin Zhongrong but could write with even bolder strokes. He was especially favored by elders in the family and other teachers, who would always look over and appreciate his works whenever he produced them." Yan Zhaofu's son Yan Weizhen was "kind, filially respectful, friendly and affectionate with siblings, but was orphaned when young, and was brought up by his uncle Yin Zhongrong, who taught him calligraphy. His family was poor and could afford neither paper nor brush, so he practiced by using a rock to write on dirt, which was why he became most well-known for the cursive script of calligraphy. During the inaugural year of the Tianshou era of the reign of Empress Wu Zetian of Tang, he participated in the imperial examination and scored high marks." He was also "chosen for positions in Wen county and Yongchang of Luo Prefecture, and in both instances, he was promoted to higher positions. Assistant Minister Su Weidao announced, 'One of the candidates is so proficient with calligraphy!' and praised for a long time." When Yan Weizhen passed away, Emperor Suzong of Tang mentioned him as being "A natural-born minister, ethically outstanding, highly educated and knowledgeable, and remarkably apt with all the six categories of Chinese characters. He often scored well in exams, was promoted on numerous occasions, worked in a king's residence and was widely reputable." In addition, Yaoqing, another member of the Yan clan, was "good at writing poems in the cursive script," Xuqing was "skillful in the cursive script," who "mastered annotations of the *Classics of Poetry* and excelled at analyzing and deciphering ancient texts," while Yunnan "wrote fantastic poems that many recited and was good at writing in cursive script" (Yan, 1992). Eminent calligrapher Yan Zhenqing also hailed from this family, and he was also "orphaned at a young age and taught personally by uncles Ji and Yunnan." Yan Zhenqing's early education in calligraphy can probably mostly attributed to his uncle being "extraordinarily smart and particularly adept with writing" (Yan, 1992). Ouyang Tong, the son of celebrated calligrapher Ouyang Xun, was "orphaned at a young age and was taught his father's calligraphy by his mother Lady Xu," who "was quite talented in this regard and studied and trained industriously day and night, eventually reaching a status no less than his father Xun" (Liu, 1975). "The Xu and the Yan" were renowned calligraphy families of the Tang Dynasty, with Xu referring to the likes of Xu Hao, whose grandfather Xu Shidao<sup>①</sup> and father Xu Qiaozhi were both widely lauded calligraphers.

① In Vol.276 of the *Complete Collection of Tang Poems*, as in the poem *Xiaoyan Lugong Song Tingyun Guicui Weisi* (Xiaoyan Master Lu sent Tingyun back to Cuiwei Temple) by Lu Lun, it was written that "Tingyun is studious in deciphering Confucius' works, so much so that his sleeves are stained by ink from the texts." p. 31, p. 34.

Under the influence of the paternal side of this family, Xu Hao carried on the family teaching, honed his skills in calligraphy and writing, and became famed for his calligraphic works in both the regular script and clerical script. Worth mentioning is that his sons Xu Shu, Xu Xian, Xu Dang and Xu Mei, and nephews Xu Xu, Xu Guan and Xu Gong were all notable as calligraphers. In his *Guji Ji* (Records of Ancient Writings), Xu Hao wrote, “I taught my eldest son Xu Shu personally since his childhood. He studied diligently since his youth, and he was serious in his studies and earnest in learning calligraphy. He developed keen eyes for ancient writings, at a level surpassing his peers” (Zhang, 1984). His second son Xu Xian was also proficient in writing cursive and regular scripts, and he was appointed to official positions at locations such as Fanshui and Qinzhou (Lin, 1994). Xu Dang was deft in the regular script style of calligraphy, while Xu Gong was praised for his skills with the clerical script. In addition, Xu Hao’s nephew Xu Xu was also a commendable calligrapher. Xu You had seven sons, namely Xu You, Xu Ti, Xu Ji, Xu Cheng, Xu Fu, Xu Xie and Xu Wei, who were all expert calligraphers. Four generations of the Xu family produced a score of masterful calligraphers accomplished in various scripts from cursive and clerical to regular and the running style, and they achieved extraordinary fame in the calligraphy circle unrivaled by any others in the Tang Dynasty. Such a feat evidently indicates the pronounced family teaching in the Xu clan, which was obviously calligraphy. Zhu Changwen, a calligraphy philosopher from the Northern Song Dynasty, wrote in chapter three Xu Shu Duan of his *Mochi Pian* (Writing about the Ink Pool) that Xu Hao “was adept with the regular script, *ba fen*, clerical script and the running style. There was a myriad of skillful calligraphers in the Tang Dynasty, but the Xu clan was the only one that produced skillful calligraphers for three generations.”<sup>①</sup> Such a feat was probably attributed to youngsters in the Xu clan being surrounded by seniors and siblings that were all calligraphers, which instilled in them traits and essences necessary for calligraphic prowess. On the contrary, those who lack calligraphy heritage passed down from previous generation often only “learned the techniques but not the secrets.” Even those parents that “broadly sought renowned materials to teach their sons, and intensely observed and instructed their progress,” failed the majority of the time, “they would not achieve” (Dong, 1983).

Following the perpetuation of the “officials selected based on literary prowess” mentality of the imperial examination system in the mid- and late-Tang Dynasty, it was natural to emphasize poetry and *fu* poetry (rhapsody) in the family ethics and family learning of the new breed of aristocrats that attributed their rise to sound learning and academic performance. During the Yuanhe and Changqing eras respectively during the reigns of Emperor Xianzong and Emperor Muzong of Tang, the phenomenon of the “Yuan-Bai School of Poetry,” a style given to the poems of Yuan Zhen and works of the top exam performer Bai Juyi, was so prevalent that “even children in countryside schools compete with each other in poem recital,” and teachers in rural villages considered teaching “Letian’s and Weizhi’s poems”

① Families and clans that were adept in literary works were quite commonplace in the Tang Dynasty. For instance, in the second part of *Lu Xi Sheng*, which was Vol.4 in the *Xuanhe Shupu* by an unknown author and annotated by Gu Yi, it was written, “(Xisheng) came from a family of literati, and whose uncle from six generations ago was well-known for masterful calligraphic skills in the cursive script...an ancestor from four generations ago named Jingrong was renowned for an extensive grasp of knowledge and also excellence in literature...thus when Xisheng came about, family rules were quickly reinstated.” Shanghai Calligraphy and Painting Publishing House, 1984 edition, p. 32-33.

(respectively the courtesy names of Bai and Yuan) a sort of fashionable undertaking. Bai Juyi naturally deemed children's education of his own offspring a top priority, and he wrote a raft of instructional poems to cultivate his posterity. In his *Nong Gui Luo*, Bai Juyi wrote, "I have a nephew six-year-old nicknamed Agui, and a daughter three-year-old nicknamed Luo'er, one of them learns comedies and the other could recite rhymes and poems. During the day they like to stay with me, and at night they sleep next to me." Bai Juyi had no son and thus to him nephew Agui was no different than his own son. Evidently, children in the Bai clan such as Agui (also nicknamed Gui'er) and Luo'er were imbued or educated with knowledge on poetry and *fu* poetry (rhapsody) by a master of the "Yuan-Bai School of Poetry" like Bai Juyi during their daily routines at a young age, which eventually "led to their success and fame" (Liu, 1975). In *Wen Gui'er Yongshi* (Listening to Recital of Poems by Gui'er), after his endearing son-like nephew Gui'er finished reciting poems and rhymes, he imitated the way his father (Bai Juyi's brother) sat, shaking his knees while supporting his chin with his hand as he contemplated (Peng, 1960), which vividly portrayed a scene of him teaching Agui how to recite poetry. In *Yinhou Xishi Dizi* (Jokingly Instruct Posterity after Drinking), Bai Juyi wrote after drinking, "I am your teacher, you are my student. Confucius school has precepts, which I shall relay to you" (Peng, 1960), which depicted scenes of how he taught his posterity, and his instructions and expectations for his posterity. When he was young, in *Mengxia Siwei Cunjiu Jujì Shedi* Bai Juyi wrote, "This time one year ago, we were traveling together. I had poetry classics with my posterity, and there were children servants in the farm" (Peng, 1960). Bai Juyi had a younger brother named Bai Xingjian, who "could write like his elder brother, with rhymes and *fu* poetry (rhapsody) being particularly eloquent, and had the flair of a master. Bai Juyi adored him, and the brothers treated each other respectfully and affectionately," and he was also a top-performing imperial exam participant (Liu, 1975). His cousin Bai Minzhong was "orphaned when young and was taught by his elder brothers and cousins. During the early stage of the Changqing era, he was one of the top scorers in the imperial examination," and eventually climbed to the rank of chancellor (Liu, 1975). Clearly, Bai Juyi and his brothers and cousins were able to achieve great repute and imperial exam scores largely because of the Bai's family ethics and family precepts. In particular, Bai Minzhong's stellar imperial examination performance was predominantly attributed to instructions from his two elder cousins.

The sound family ethics and family learning in aristocratic clans were founded upon the abundance of education resources, with children's education for the youngsters in the clan holding particular significance. For example, Wei Shu was born in the Wei clan of Jingzhao, whose father and grandfather were high-ranking officials and grew up in a house with a massive collection of around two thousand scrolls. When Wei Shu was still a child he had already "read over the classics several times," and thereafter he was among the best performers in the imperial examination. He was lauded for his extensive scope of knowledge. He wrote the 20-volume *Kaiyuan Pu* (Register of the Kaiyuan Era) and garnered prestige as a famed "man of *Ci* poetry" of the Kaiyuan era. The six of them, including Wei Shu's younger brothers Wei Di, Wei You, Wei Jiong, Wei Qi and Wei Xun, all "performed well in the imperial exam due to their aptitude in *Ci* poetry" (Liu, 1975). The success of the six Wei brothers was clearly because of the sound family ethics and family learning in their household, as well as the copious educational resources



available to them.

## Conclusion

The rise or fall of a clan in ancient China was tightly intertwined with the quality of its family precepts, family rules and family ethics. Strict family rules played a vital role in guaranteeing and augmenting family precepts, and the formation of sound family ethics necessitated sound family precepts which standardized or governed the behavioral norms, treatment of others and events and other aspects of clan members and their posterity. The continuation of outstanding family ethics relied on family learning to foster and educate posterity, so as to maintain and preserve exemplary family ethics, family precepts, family rules and family learning. After the height of the Tang Dynasty, it was not uncommon to see the “posterity of high-ranking government officials decline after losing the shelter and prestige of their ancestors, dwindling to despair that starkly contrasted against their earlier affluence, with many forced to resort to lowly and competitive commerce.” (Liu, 1975) Therefore, for renowned clans to maintain prosperity in future generations, it was necessary to focus on family precepts and family rules while advocating exemplary family ethics. Just as Liu Pin said, “For every respectable clan, they were all founded because of their loyal, filially respectful, diligent and frugal ancestors, and all diminished because of their stubbornly excessive and prideful posterity” (Ouyang, 1975), which he hoped to caution posterity to harbor great aspiration at a young age, namely the yearning to preserve the glory of the clan and the expansion of the family, while those who desecrated the family would be punished as severely as being buried elsewhere away from ancestors. Just as written by Liu Pin in *Jie Zisun*, “For those who come from a major clan, one single action could dishonor precepts passed down from ancestors and would affect many others. He might remain an official or noble during his lifetime but feel guilty to see ancestors in the afterlife” (Ouyang, 1975). This is because the “founding of an aristocratic clan is as difficult as reaching the sky, but its destruction is as easy as lighting up a feather” (Ouyang, 1975). Therefore, a major clan was prone to downfall without strict family learning, righteous family ethics and right family precepts. Strengthening family ethics, family precepts, family learning and family rules undoubtedly became a primary method for aristocratic clans to maintain their prestige. Objectively speaking, this in turn advanced developments in children’s education, subsequently promoting the enlightenment of society through education and prosperity of culture and contributing to preserving social order. Of course, the root cause behind the emergence of family precepts, the rigors in family rules and the compliance with social norms in family ethics of the Tang Dynasty was the advents of the Sui and Tang dynasties, both of which relied on centralized authority and endeavored to suppress the power of local aristocrats via enforcing restrictions on localized voting and governance, implementation of the imperial examination system, advocacy of the “stop warfare, encourage education” policy and promotion of the “officials selected based on literary prowess” mentality. These efforts markedly undermined the political clout of Tang aristocrats, and aristocratic clans both old and new had to upgrade and update their family ethics

and earnestly carry out family learning to cultivate academic studiousness in their posterity and to encourage them to partake in the imperial exams for the purpose of garnering prestige and position. This instigated the unique feature of “poetry and classics to be passed on within the family” in Chinese precepts, and at the same time preserved the traditions of loyalty, filial piety, diligence, frugality, honesty, and integrity.

## REFERENCES

- Bai, J. (1979). *Collection of poems by Bai Juyi*. Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company.
- Chen, Z. (2004). *Research on Tang Dynasty family precepts*. Fuzhou, Fujian Normal University.
- Chen, Y. (1997). *Tang Dynasty political history discussions Part II, political revolution and party division*. Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 69.
- Deng, W. (1985). Verifications and interpretation of written version of Baixingzhang from Dunhuang. *Dunhuang Research*, 71-98.
- Dong, G. (1983). *All literatures of Tang Dynasty*. Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company.
- Du, F., & Chou, Z. (1979). *Detailed annotations of Du Fu poems, scroll 17, Zongwu's birthday*. Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 1477.
- Du, Y. (1988). *Comprehensive institutions, scroll 15, volume three examinations and advancement*. Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 358.
- Dugu, J. (1993). *Piling collection, scroll 11, record on tomb of Duke Li the Sandaifu zhongshu sheren secretary and junior supervisor of past Tang administration*. Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 86.
- Jin Yingkun (2018). Discussion on ancient family precepts and formation of traits of the Chinese people. *Journal of Xiamen University (Arts & Social Sciences Edition)*, 25-33.
- Jin, Y. (2019). Ancient family precepts and formation of traits of the Chinese people. *China Science Daily*.
- Jin, Y. (2018). Tang Dynasty family precepts, family ethics family rules and educational enlightenment of society. *Guangming Daily, Theories Edition*.
- Lin, B. (1994). *Collection of family names in the Yuanhe era, scroll 2, The Xu clans in different prefectures*. Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 209.
- Li, L., & Xing, B. (1999). *Exegesis on the classic of filial piety, scroll 8, chapter on sensibility, No.17*. Beijing, Peking University Press.
- Li, X. (1999) *Exegesis on the 13 classics, proofread edition, Vol.12*. Beijing, Peking University Press.
- Li, S. (2015). *Collection of Poems by Li Shangyin, Scroll 3, Part II The Poem of Jiao'er.* Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 326.
- Li, S. (1988). *Collection of writings by Fan Nan, scroll 6, Jichushi Shi'erfang Shufu Wen*. Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 339.
- Li, S. (1985). *Paragon for emperor, scroll 3, Advocating Frugality*. Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 31.
- Liang, S. (2000). *Collection of writings by Liang Su, scroll 2, send huangfu off to Guangzhou for the 7th time*. Lanzhou, Gansu People's Publishing House.
- Liu, S. (1984). *New stories about the great Tang, scroll 12, advocacy and encouragement No.26*. Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 177.
- Liu, X. (1975). *Old book of Tang*. Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company.
- Yang, B. (1958). *Lunyu Yizhu, Interpretations and annotation of the analects of confucius, The Ji's chapter 16*. Interpretation and annotation, Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 176.
- National Library of China (2007). *Ancient texts from Dunhuang housed in the national library of china, Vol.58*. Beijing, Beijing Library Press, 79.
- National Library of China (2007). *Ancient texts from Dunhuang housed in the national library of China, Vol.54*. Beijing, Beijing Library Press, 96.

- Ouyang, X., & Song, Q. (1975). *New book of Tang*. Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company.
- Peng, D. (1960). *Complete Tang poems*. Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company.
- Quan, D. (2008). *Collection of poems and writings by Quan Deyu, scroll 39, sending Qiu Ying to examination*. Proofread by Guo Guangwei. Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 582.
- Qian, M. (1963). Brief discussion on academic culture of Wei and Jin dynasties and the Northern and Southern dynasties period, and their associations with families and clans of the Time. *New Asia Academic News*.
- Ren, B. (2006). *Comprehensive compilation of dunhuang songs and ci poems part II, scroll 5, miscellaneous songs - fixed and joint compositions*. Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 989.
- Dunhuang and western China literatures housed in France, Vol.20*. (2001). Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 213. Shanghai Classics Publishing House, Bibliothèque nationale de France. *Dunhuang and western China literatures housed in France, Vol.16*. (2001). Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House.
- Shanghai Classics Publishing House, Bibliothèque nationale de France. *Dunhuang and western China literatures housed in France, Vol.18*. (2001). Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 28.
- Song, M. (2008). *Collection of tang imperial edicts, scroll 80, elderly care – edict on rewards for people of filial piety and integrity*. Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 460.
- Wang, B., & Jiang, Q. (1995). *Collected annotations on writings by Wang Zi'an, scroll 4, about assistant minister Pei from department of superior officials*. Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 131.
- Wang, L. (1993). *Collected explanations on the family instructions of master Yan, additional and supplementary Edition*. Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, Preface.
- Wang, M. (2006). Analysis of the social value of ancient chinese family precepts. *Journal of Ancient Classics Collation and Studies*, 51, 60-64.
- Wang, F. (1991). *Verifications and annotations of poems of Wang Fanzhi*. Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 483.
- Yuan, Z. (1982). *Collection of writings by Yuan Zhen, scroll 30, writings to nephews*. Proofread by Ji Qin. Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 355-356.
- Yan, Z. (1992). *Collections of Duke Yanlu*. Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House.
- Zhang, Y. (1984). *Key records on rules and classics, scroll 3, records of ancient writings by Xu Hao of Tang Dynasty*. Proofread by Fan Xiangyong. Beijing, People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 124.
- Zhang, X. (2006). *All poems of Dunhuang part II - qu and ci, scroll 128*. Beijing, The Writers Publishing House, 5030, 5033.
- Zhao, X. (2010). Discussion on culture of Tang Dynasty family precepts and their literary importance, observation centering on literati and officialdom during the early height of Tang Dynasty. *Guizhou Social Sciences*, 107-113.
- Zheng, C. (1994). *Miscellaneous records about Ming emperors, part I*. Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, 12.

(Translator: Arthur; Editor: Gerald)

This paper has been translated and reprinted from *Journal of Zhejiang Normal University (Social Sciences)*, No. 1, 2020, pp. 13–21.