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## Explanatory Comments on *Di Zi Gui* (Students' Rules) – 3 Verses 10 – 13: **XIAO (BEING GOOD TO PARENTS) – 2**

by Feng Xin-ming, Feb. 24, 2008

For the *Di Zi Gui* text for verses 10 – 13, see pp. 6 & 7 at  
[http://www.tsoidug.org/dizigui/dizigui\\_web.pdf](http://www.tsoidug.org/dizigui/dizigui_web.pdf).

This continues the section in *Di Zi Gui* on *xiao* 孝 or being good to parents.

For my explanatory comments on the main concept of *xiao*, see “Explanatory Comments on *Di Zi Gui* – 1, First Page: the Main Summary” at  
[http://www.tsoidug.org/dizigui/Exp\\_Comm\\_1\\_DZG.pdf](http://www.tsoidug.org/dizigui/Exp_Comm_1_DZG.pdf). For an authoritative Confucian classic on *xiao*, also see *Xiao Jing (The Classic of Xiao)* on this website at  
[http://www.tsoidug.org/Papers/Xiao\\_Jing\\_Comment.pdf](http://www.tsoidug.org/Papers/Xiao_Jing_Comment.pdf).

### **VERSE (10)**

冬則溫，夏則清；

*dong- ze' wen-, xia` ze' qing-*

**In winter one keeps warm; in summer one keeps cool.**

#### **Explanatory Comments:**

This is a quote by *Di Zi Gi* from the Confucian classic *Li Ji* 禮記 or *The Book of Propriety*, written sometime during the Spring And Autumn and Warring States Periods (approx. 720 to 220 B.C.E.): “Propriety for all who are sons requires warmth in the winter and coolness in the summer, settling in the evening and *sheng* in the morning, and not quarreling when with peers (凡為人子之禮，冬溫而夏清，昏定而晨省，在醜夷不爭).”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This passage in *Di Zi Gui* comes from *The Book of Propriety* (禮記), of the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States Periods (approx. 720 to 220 B.C.E.—D.F.), the Volume “Rules of Propriety, First”, Roll 1 (「曲禮上」卷一). Source: *The Book of Propriety Li Ji – The Correct Meaning* (禮記正義), from The Thirteen Classics Annotated (十三經注疏), published by Zhonghua Shudian (中華書店), Beijing, 1980, page 1,233.

There are two ways to interpret this quotation: there's mine and then there's the majority one.

### A. My Interpretation

My interpretation of this verse is that we are being exhorted by *Di Zi Gui* to be *xiao* by keeping warm in winter and staying cool in summer. Now why is keeping warm in winter and staying cool in summer a part of *xiao* or being good to parents? That's because keeping warm in winter and keeping cool in summer is part of looking after one's body, and looking after one's body is part of *xiao*. Yes, indeed, looking after oneself physically is in fact considered a very important part of being good to parents.

In the ancient classic written around 500 B.C.E., *Xiao Jing (The Classic of Xiao)*, a work that is contemporaneous with *Li Ji*, Confucius is quoted to have said: "The body, hair and skin, all have been received from the parents, and so one doesn't dare damage them—that is the beginning of *xiao*. 身體髮膚，受之父母，不敢毀傷，孝之始也。" (See [http://www.tsoidug.org/Papers/Xiao\\_Jing\\_Transltn.pdf](http://www.tsoidug.org/Papers/Xiao_Jing_Transltn.pdf), p. 3.)

Parents love their offspring and work very hard to care for the offspring, to give the best to the offspring. When the offspring cooperate and help look after and be good to themselves, it not only lightens the load on the parents, but also brings the parents the utmost happiness. That's why it is an extremely important part of *xiao*, of being good to parents, for offspring to look after their bodies. When their offspring suffer from illness and ill health, parents worry and become sad. It is not *xiao*, it is not good to parents, to neglect one's body. Therefore, keeping warm in the winter and cool in the summer, without one's parents having to remind one, is in itself being good to parents.

In fact, in Confucius' view, being good to oneself, i.e. taking care of oneself both physically and morally, is a vital part of being good to one's parents. In the above passage, Confucius goes on to say, "Establishing oneself, practicing what is correct (The Way), spreading the fame of one's name to posterity, so that one's parents become renowned—that is the end of *xiao*. 立身行道，揚名於後世，以顯父母，孝之終也。" ([http://www.tsoidug.org/Papers/Xiao\\_Jing\\_Transltn.pdf](http://www.tsoidug.org/Papers/Xiao_Jing_Transltn.pdf), p. 3.)

That is why in traditional China Loving Self (自愛 *zi ai*) is considered such an important virtue, and young people are always exhorted to Love Self. Now this is not some narcissistic self-love, but a respect for self and a due caring for self. Loving Self is considered a precondition for placing high demands on oneself and keeping one's character noble and aspirations high. In contrast, if one does not Love Self, then one will start Abusing and Giving up on Self (自暴自棄 *zi bao zi qi*), will look down upon oneself, will not place high demands on oneself, and thus will degenerate. Loving Self (自愛 *zi ai*) is an essential part of *xiao*, of being good to parents.

By the way, in deference to the quote from Confucius about "body, hair and skin," Chinese before the rule of the Manchu Qing Dynasty in 1644 never cut their hair or shave their beards, because that would be damaging a part of the body.

### B. The Majority Interpretation

The majority interpretation is one that has been accepted by most scholars since the early 600's C.E. when the Emperor's commissioner Lu De-ming re-interpreted the quote in *Li Ji* that forms the basis of this verse. This interpretation relies on changing the last (sixth) word in this verse. Instead of the original ancient text's word 清 (*qing*) with the "water radical," the word that I stick to in my interpretation, a word that in this phrase means "to cool down," i.e. a word that is an "intransitive verb," the interpretation accepted by the majority uses the word 清 (*qing*) with the "ice radical", a word that means "to cool something down," i.e. a word that is always a "transitive verb" only. According to this interpretation then, this verse means, "In winter one warms up the parents' bed; in summer one cools down the parents' bed."

This is a reference to the famous story of the boy Huang Xiang (18 – 106 C.E.). Huang Xiang's mother dies early and his father not only has to go to work during the day but also has to do housework when he comes home to look after his offspring. Appreciative of this, Huang Xiang tries to make life more palatable for his father. Every winter night Huang Xiang warms up the father's bed by first sleeping in it before his father comes to bed, and every summer night cools his father's bed by fanning it.

Through the centuries many Chinese youngsters have been inspired by this story to be good to their parents by serving them in their daily life.

With the authenticity of the classics in mind, however, I regard this substitution of the original, ancient version of the word 清 (*qing*) and thus this entire interpretation as later, Tang Dynasty revisions to the ancient *Li Ji*, which dates from the Spring-and-Autumn Period and precedes the Tang Dynasty by about a thousand years. The reader may refer to my paper on this topic at [http://www.tsoidug.org/dizigui/DZG\\_winter\\_warm.pdf](http://www.tsoidug.org/dizigui/DZG_winter_warm.pdf).

There are some scholars who realize that while it is a stretch to interpret the words "warm" and "cool" as meaning warming up and cooling down parents' beds, nevertheless assert that the words do mean warming up and cooling down the parents themselves. So, as with Lu De-ming's interpretation, this is also an interpretation along the line that offspring need to serve their parents in their daily life.

Despite my concern with authenticity, the point that offspring need to serve their parents is a valid and a very important one. Therefore, I think that while my interpretation is more true to *Li Ji*'s original meaning, it is fully acceptable to follow the majority interpretation because it is just as valuable as my interpretation for educating the young.

Serving parents in daily life is great training for youngsters and for the development of character. Carrying out such service to parents trains the youngsters to realize that they have an obligation to repay the great kindness their parents bestow, to become less self-centered, a trait to which youngsters are prone, to learn to be kind and thoughtful to others, and to learn how to serve others. Indeed, instead of pandering to the youngsters' every whim, today's parents should be demanding that youngsters be more appreciative and to actually render some form of service to repay their parents. In this day and age of the spoiled, self-centered only child, of "the little emperor," such training has never been needed more. Thus, even if the service rendered may not actually be of much practical use, e.g. most able bodied parents don't need their beds warmed in winter or cooled in

summer, parents should encourage their children to perform such thoughtful services, and express approval when they are performed.

Of course, service to parents is essential when parents become old or infirm.

## **VERSE (11)**

辰則省，昏則定。

*chen ze xing, hun ze ding*

**In the morning one thinks over one's conduct; in the evening one settles down.**

This verse is a continuation of the quote from the Confucian classic *The Book of Propriety* or *Li Ji* 禮記, a quote to which the previous verse we've discussed, verse 10, also belongs: "Propriety for all who are sons requires warmth in the winter and coolness in the summer, settling in the evening and *sheng* in the morning, and not quarreling when with peers (凡為人子之禮，冬温而夏清，昏定而晨省，在醜夷不爭)。"<sup>2</sup> Again, based on different understandings of this *Li Ji* quote, there are two interpretations, mine and the majority one.

### A. My Interpretation

Continuing with my interpretation of the *Li Ji* quote as a prescription for taking care of oneself both physically and morally as part of being *xiao*, I take the third word in this verse, *xing* 省, as meaning "to inspect oneself (as to conduct)." This usage of the word is seen in Chapter One of *The Analects of Confucius*, a work that is contemporaneous with *Li Ji*, "Zeng Zi said, 'Every day I *xing* (inspect) myself (as to conduct) thrice: in planning on others' behalf have I been disloyal? In dealings with my friends have I been untrustworthy? Have I taught but not practiced? 曾子曰：吾日三省吾身：為人謀而不忠乎？與朋友交而不信乎？傳不習乎？" Also along the lines of self-care and self-improvement I take the sixth word of this verse, *ding* 定, to mean its usual meaning: to settle down. Thus this verse means, "In the morning one thinks over one's conduct (inspects oneself as to conduct); in the evening one settles down."

According to my interpretation then, the first half of this verse emphasizes that being *xiao* demands that one's conduct must be good.

This is also in line with the idea expressed in another work contemporaneous with *Li Ji*, *Xiao Jing* (*The Classic of Xiao*) ([http://www.tsoidug.org/Papers/Xiao\\_Jing\\_Transltn.pdf](http://www.tsoidug.org/Papers/Xiao_Jing_Transltn.pdf)), a work that we have mentioned above in the discussion on Verse 10, that *xiao* or being good to one's parents involves not only good conduct towards parents, but also good conduct in general, including conduct when outside the family. In Chapter Ten of *Xiao Jing* Confucius says, "He who serves his parents is not arrogant when he is a superior, not rebellious when he is a subordinate, and not quarrelsome when he is with his peers.... If these three things are not rejected, then even though one provides for one's parents so sumptuously as to serve the Three Animals (beef, pork, mutton--*translator*) daily, one is

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<sup>2</sup> Source: *Op. cit.* 1.

still un-*xiao*. 事親者，居上不驕，為下不亂，在醜不爭… 三者不除，雖日用三牲之養，猶為不孝也。”<sup>3</sup>

### B. The Majority Interpretation

Again the majority interpretation is from the early 600's C.E. Emperor's commissioner Lu De-ming's re-interpretation of the original quote from *Li Ji*.

Continuing with his interpretation of the *Li Ji* quote as a prescription for serving parents in their daily life, Lu De-ming interprets the third word of this verse, *xing* 省, to mean “visiting or asking after,” i.e. “visiting or asking after one's parents.” So the first three words of Verse 11 would mean “in the morning one asks after one's parents.”

Also continuing with the theme of serving or being nice to parents in their daily life, Lu De-ming interprets the last three words of this verse to mean, “in the evening one settles one's parents' bed.” Instead of the bed, some scholars say that the verse refers to settling down one's parents themselves. Still, both interpretations are along the lines of service to parents in their daily life.

Again, as I've pointed out in the previous discussion on Verse 10, the point that offspring need to serve their parents is a valid and a very important one. Therefore, while I think that my interpretation is more true to *Li Ji*'s original meaning, it is fully acceptable to follow the majority interpretation because the it is just as valuable as my interpretation for educating the young.

### VERSE (12)

出必告，返必面；

*chu bi gao, fan bi mian*

**When leaving one must tell one's parents; upon returning one must see them face-to-face.**

When living with parents in the same house, it's simply a matter of basic courtesy that you tell them when you are leaving the house. It is also a matter of basic courtesy that you tell them where you are going, what you are doing, and when to expect you to come back. That's first, so that parents don't worry about you, and second, so that parents can have a chance to give you advice and help, like giving you reminders as you are on your way out the door.

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<sup>3</sup> By the way, the use of the phrase “not quarrelsome with peers 在醜不爭 *zai chou bu zheng*” in this quote from *Xiao Jing* parallels exactly the quote in question from *Li Ji*, to which the two verses (10 and 11) of *Di Zi Gui* under consideration refer, for *Li Ji*'s quote also mentions quarreling with peers: “Propriety for all who are sons requires warmth in the winter and coolness in the summer, settling in the evening and *sheng* in the morning, and not quarreling when with peers (凡為人子之禮，冬温而夏清，昏定而晨省，在醜夷不爭 – ...*zai chou yi bu zheng*).” This lends support to my interpretation of *Li Ji*'s quote as meaning that *xiao* demands taking care of oneself both physically and morally.

Of course, that's exactly why a lot of times offspring don't tell their parents about going out: the desire to avoid possible parental interference, restrictions and possibly even opposition and prohibition. It seems as if there's been this problem from ages past, and that's why even back in the old days of traditional China, *Di Zi Gui* has to make it a special point to exhort offspring to always tell parents when leaving.

In a harmonious family there wouldn't be this sort of tension; all differences of opinion about what the offspring is going out to do should have been settled way beforehand, and it's just a routine notification when he or she goes out.

It is in dysfunctional families that there is a lot of conflict between parents and offspring over the offspring's activities. In dysfunctional families there is little exchange of differing opinions and little mutual cooperation in working through these opinions to arrive at a consensus. Often one side, the side of authority, just makes the other side submit by the use of force, by the use of threats or punishments. In response the other, less powerful side, then often uses lies and deception to get its way. Still other times the members of the dysfunctional family each go their own way, not caring to tell each other what they are doing because when they do, significant conflict arises.

To have a harmonious family, the important thing to foster is open discussion. Of course, this has to be on the premise that the family members share common core values, that is, on the premise that the parents themselves share common core values with each other and the offspring have been brought up properly and taught these values. On this basis it should be routine practice to air different opinions and to welcome such airing, and it should be routine practice to discuss different ideas and opinions in a cooperative way, in order to arrive at even better ways of thinking about things and of doing things. There should be a culture that everything can be discussed and that on all matters views can be exchanged, 凡事都有商量。

Of course, sometimes a consensus cannot be reached. In my opinion, when offspring reach fifteen, they should be given the respect and dignity accorded responsible adults, and they should have the final say over what their own activities should be. Nowadays, sadly, young people are infantilized and treated as little children even when they are way past that stage. I've heard of instances where, though they are far more than old enough to serve in the army (eighteen), the parents still tell such offspring when to do what homework and when and whether to meet which friend or friends. Good gracious! By the time they are fifteen, they should be responsible persons already, responsible not only for themselves but also for others, such as having responsibilities towards helping the family with chores or income, and how can they ever become responsible persons if they are never allowed to make their own decisions and figure out on their own how to allocate their time so that they can meet both their desires and their obligations? Or to figure out on their own whether to accept particular pieces of advice, even if such advice comes from their parents? Infantilization should stop. Parents should offer advice and guidance, but the final decision should be left to the offspring once past a certain age.

Indeed, if the offspring is wise, he or she will value and actively seek out parental advice and guidance about activities. If nothing else, parents can act as a good sounding board off which to bounce the offspring's own ideas.

Of course, not all offspring are wise, at least not on all occasions, so it's good for the offspring to always let the parents know what the offspring is doing, in case the parents have important advice and guidance to give.

That's why it is *xiao* to keep parents updated. Updating parents is not just so that parents won't worry as much, but also so that they will be able to help out if necessary. Parents want to help their offspring, especially with advice and guidance, and should be given the opportunity. It is a basic sign of respect and of treating them as family. Parents can have the opportunity to help only when the offspring keep the parents updated on what is going on with school, with activities, with career, with courtship, with friends, and so forth and so on. One may not take the parents' advice, but one should give them the opportunity to render such advice. Therefore one must keep parents updated. Letting parents know when one leaves is merely part of the bigger, overall principle of keeping parents updated.

All the same things apply to notifying parents when one returns home. Also, ideally one should actually see the parents face-to-face upon return so that parents can see for themselves that one is well and safe and sound.

### **VERSE (13)**

居有常，業無變。

*ju you chang, ye wu bian*

**There must be regularity in one's daily life, and no change in one's career.**

Having regularity in one's daily life is just part of looking after one's health. As doctors and scientists all agree, eating more or less set amounts at set hours, going to bed and rising at set times, working regular hours, and so forth, are conducive to staying healthy. As we have pointed out in the discussion on verses 10 and 11, staying healthy is part of *xiao*, and so having regularity in one's daily life is part of *xiao*.

Having no change in one's career is part of *xiao* because that is thought by *Di Zi Gui*'s author to be good for one's career, and having a good career is considered part of *xiao*. Back in the old, traditional days when *Di Zi Gui* is written, careers and professions are life-long, and to change one's career is usually a bad thing, a step down in life, the result of expulsion by a profession or an irresponsible act of abandonment of one's profession.

It should be obvious to the reader by now that to be *xiao*, to be good to parents, one must be good to oneself. In this verse, verse 13, one is enjoined to be good to oneself physically by looking after one's health, and to be good to oneself career-wise by looking after one's career. In other verses one is enjoined to be good to oneself morally by engaging only in moral and upright conduct, and so on and so forth. Being good to oneself is part of being good to parents – the traditional Chinese-Confucian concept of *xiao* fully takes into account the great love and cherishment parents have for their offspring.