The Eight-Legged Essay: Its Reputation, Structure, and Limitations*

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"How right the ancients were when they said: In writing an essay the mind should remain as clear as the human eye."

— Ma Ch'un-shang

I. Introduction

During the Huang Ch'ing 皇慶 period (1312-14) of the Yuan, essay subjects for civil service examinations were restricted to quotations from the *Four Books* interpreted according to the commentaries of Chu Hsi 朱熹. In 1386, during the Hung Wu 洪武 period (1368-1398) of the Ming, a first-place essay written by Huang Tzu-ch'eng 黃子澄 embodied almost all the structural elements of essays of a type which came to be known as *pa-ku wen* 八股文 "eight-legged essays." Skill in composing *pa-ku* essays became a requirement for success in the civil service examinations until the practice was finally abolished early in this century.

Because it was a product of the examination hall, many scholars were hesitant to accept the *pa-ku* essay as a genre of prose literature. Others distinguished themselves as *pa-ku* stylists. During the late Ming and early Ch'ing, exemplary essays were anthologized, widely discussed, and evaluated. By the end of the Ch'ing, however, the *pa-ku* essay had become a fashionable target of criticism, and a scapegoat for the ills of a declining empire. An element of disdain for this difficult literary form can still be detected in some modern commentaries on classical Chinese literature. Liu Ta-chieh 劉大杰, for example, maintains that the *pa-ku* essay requirement of the civil service exams restricted thought and made people stupid.[1] Despite the polemics, other modern scholars have continued to study this prose

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form, and it would seem, with good reason. As Ching-I Tu points out:

> The very fact that the *pa-ku* essay was the dominant literary form and its writing was a national practice for almost five hundred years – unparalleled in world history – is important enough to warrant serious studies on the subject.[2]

The present essay attempts a partial assessment of the reputation the practice of *pa-ku* essay composition has acquired over the centuries. Section two considers some common apologies for and criticisms of the genre. The apologies considered are divided into two types: "instrumentalist" and "purist." A discussion is then given of apologists representing various instrumentalist and purist positions drawn from Wu Ching-tzu's 吳敬梓 eighteenth century novel *Ju Lin Wai Shi* 儒林外史 as well as from non-fictional sources.

II. Reputation

A. Instrumentalist arguments

"Instrumentalist apologies" are arguments which advocate the study and composition of the *pa-ku* essay as an instrument for securing some end. The ends sought by both students and examiners were not necessarily related to literature or philosophy, or for that matter, to each other. Students sought fame and wealth by their compositions. Examiners, on the other hand, sought a measure of the character of those who were applying for positions in civil service.

(1) Arguments from the students point of view:

Ma Ch'un-shang 馬純上 compiles, edits and comments on *pa-ku* essays for publication and sale through various book stores. He claims to reveal through his commentaries the general principles of *pa-ku* composition:

> . . . when I comment on essays I try to use the language of Chu Hsi, often sitting up half the night to write one note. And because I write nothing carelessly, students who have read one of my commentaries may think out the principles for a dozen essays.[3]

Ma is anxious to preserve his reputation as a scholar whose interest in the classics is a labor of love. He wants to be known as someone who would not consider gaining an advantage if it meant doing wrong. Consider how he deals with Chu Hsien-fu. Chu wants his name to appear on the frontispiece of Ma's most recent anthology. But instead of suggesting that it would be wrong for Chu to take credit for someone else's work, he argues instead:

> I don't want to spoil my reputation by giving the impression that I am out for profit; yet if I put your name down after mine, people will think that you financed the publication and that I am working for money. On the other hand, if I put your name before mine, that will mean that the little reputation I have enjoyed all these years will seem false.[4]

Although he feigns disdain for profit, Ma assumes that this is what all his students are seeking. He encourages their study of the *pa-ku* form by arguing that skill in *pa-ku* composition is a stepping stone to luxury, and recognition as a filial son. He tells K'uang Chau-jen 匡超人, for example:

> As the proverb says: "There are golden mansions in study; there are bushels of rice and beautiful women." And what is study today if not our *pa-ku* compositions?[5]

Since fame and wealth reflect credit on one's family, Ma further contends, ". . . passing the official examinations [is] the most important way of pleasing your parents."[6]

Chou Chin 周進 cannot hide his conviction that the *pa-ku* essay is an instrument whose skillful use leads to social status. He himself is a man of sixty and has been vainly preparing for the examinations all his life. Although he has served as a tutor for other successful students, Chou is deeply troubled by his failures. Unable to reject the social system that has denied him, he rejects himself instead. On an outing with friends to the examination school in the provincial capital, Chou is so filled with self-hatred and remorse that he smashes his head viciously against an examination desk. Ironically, his reactions to his failures show, after all, that he *has* failed to understand the classics. Had he been in the least philosophically

broadened by his studies, he might have been a proud, poor, but enlightened scholar. Instead, he has been crippled by the social pressures of scholarship, and tortured by his own failure to deal with them.

For Chou, scholarship was a vehicle to social success. When he finally *does* pass the examinations, rising meteorically to the post of "commissioner of education for Kwangtung Province," his faith in the system and the essays that were its keystone is confirmed and rewarded. Now in his capacity as commissioner of education, he frequently encourages his students with instrumentalist arguments. To a student who requests that his ability to compose poetry in "all the ancient styles" be considered, Chou replies:

> Since the emperor attaches importance to essays, why should you bring up the poems of the Han and Tang Dynasties? A candidate like you should devote all his energy to writing compositions, instead of wasting time on heterodox studies. I have come here at the imperial command to examine essays, not to discuss miscellaneous literary forms with you. This devotion to superficial things means that your real work must be neglected.[7]

Chou's refusal to consider other literary forms does not rest on his belief that they lack literary or philosophical merit; rather, he believes that they are irrelevant to the proper aims of a scholar, namely: an official position serving the emperor.

(2) Arguments from the examiner's point of view:

Like Ma Chun-shan, Wei Ti-shan 衞體善 compiles and edits collections of *pa-ku* essays. K'uang insists that he selects only examination essays that "stand up to criticism after [they have] passed." This is why he has selected no essays from among the years current examination essays. None of them, he says, "come up to standard." K'uang Chau-jen, however, challenges Wei to say what standards there are other than passing the essays. "If the candidates passed," he reasons, "their essays must have been up to standard. What other criterion 法則 is there? "[8]

K'uang's question masks an unstated assumption, namely: if the candidates passed, they themselves must have been up to standard. The standards sought from students by examiners were, among other things, standards of literary accomplishment and personal morality. Sometimes

these standards were lowered to accomodate unusual circumstances. When K'uang Ch'au-jen decided to sit for the prefectural examination Magistrate Li pleads to the examiner in K'uang's defense that he ". . . is a poor scholar and a good son." The examiner replies:

> Moral character counts more than literary attainments in a scholar. If a man shows high moral qualities, literary accomplishments are secondary.[9]

Wu Ching-tzu does not intend that these words be lightly dismissed. That he has them spoken in reference to K'uang Ch'au-jen, however, is as ironic as it is outrageous. For K'uang writes essays with so much ease that he can pass the examinations while posing as someone else! His willingness to stand in for someone else, of course, illustrates a point that Wu Ching-tzu makes over and again. Skill in the *pa-ku* essay composition is no measure of moral virtue.

Although *pa-ku* essay composition did not measure personal morality, it was a measure of how well one can analyze, clarify, and organize ideas. The use of *pa-ku* form as a format for the examination essays was officially defended on these grounds. For example in 1663 of the K'ang Hsi 康熙 period, the *pa-ku* essay requirement for the provincial and metropolitan exams was temporarily lifted. Two years later it was reinstalled. In a memorial to the throne presented by Huang Ji 黃機, the junior vice president of the Board of Rites, it was argued that the use of *pa-ku* examination essays enabled the examiners to observe the candidates' "method of thinking."[10] What does this claim amount to?

A skilled reader of *pa-ku* could determine much about an author's skill in argumentation, the liveliness of his memory, and his willingness to conform to the principles and laws of Confucian ideology. Let us examine each of these points.

ARGUMENTATION: When Chu Hsien-fu posed to Ma Chun-shang the question: "What is the chief criterion you employ in selecting essays?" Ma replied that it is "the reasoning"理法. But he is short on details here. Later when he is instructing K'uang Chau-jen in the techniques of essay writing, he criticizes K'uang for not being ". . . sufficiently familiar with the method of reasoning," a method which involves, among other things, using "juxtaposition"虛實反正 and "innuendo" 吞吐含蓄. The ability to compare and contrast individual cases: to group some together based

on similarity, and to separate others out based on difference, are skills required for any type of critical thinking. The exaggerated emphasis on parallel sentence structure in *pa-ku* prose provided a framework for students to demonstrate these skills. Plaks explains this feature nicely:

> . . . what *pa-ku* at its best demands is the ability to think under pressure, to organize ideas into a logical structure, to see inherent analogies and set up the proper coordinates of conceptualization – all this while bricked into a tiny cubicle with weighty matters of family prosperity, peer recognition, and perhaps even a favorable marriage hanging in the balance.[11]

MEMORY: A lively memory is obviously essential for someone like a magistrate who needs to remember laws and precedents, as well as what people say. A diplomat might be expected to cite passages from the classics, and to be familiar with history, other languages, and customs.

If the use of the *pa-ku* essay form in the civil service examinations was nothing else, it was a test of memory. Consider the childhood training Compiler Lu gave his daughter:

> When she was five or six he had engaged a tutor to teach her the *Four Books* and the *Five Classics*, so that by the time she was twelve she could expound the classics and read essays, having thoroughly mastered the works of Wang Shou-hsi. She had also learned to write the *pa-ku* essays with their divisions into eight paragraphs.[12]

The topic of a *pa-ku* essay is always a short quotation, sometimes taken from the *Five Classics*, but almost always drawn from the *Four Books*. To be assured of success on the examinations, one had to know them by heart.

WILLINGNESS TO CONFORM: From the standpoint of the student the rules of *pa-ku* essay composition restricted both range and depth of philosophical expression by confining it within a highly structured grid of literary and rhetorical possibilities. From the stand point of the examiner, the student's ability to follow these rules was a measure of his intelligence and willingness to conform. The rules *did* restrict thinking, but they did

so in ways that were pedagogically useful. On the one hand, the *pa-ku* essay format provided a rule governed and highly structured framework for examiners to judge the cognitive skills students show in thinking about the classics. On the other hand, the candidate's ability to conform to rigorous standards of prose composition was construed as a measure of his loyalty.

For the student, then, the *pa-ku* essay, if skillfully written, held the promise of wealth and status. For the examiner it was a tool for measuring intelligence and loyalty. Outside these parameters of agreement between student and examiner, other instrumentalist arguments for the *pa-ku* essay carry little weight.

For example, whenever Compiler Lu felt at leisure:

> . . . he would tell his daughter: "If you write *pa-ku* essays well, then whatever literary form you use – and this applies even to lyrics or descriptive poems – you will express yourself forcefully and exactly.[13]

Is Lu merely exaggerating here? Is he simply trying to encourage a reluctant daughter in her studies, or is there some truth in what he says?

It is well known that many of the rhetorical and literary devices required of *pa-ku* essay composition derive from other poetic forms. The parallelism of the *pa-ku* form, for example, derives from Han dynasty *p'ien wen* 駢文 prose forms. And, as we shall see in more detail in Section III, *pa-ku* essay composition required the use of structures and particles from classical forms of ancient *ku wen* 古文 prose. So, there probably was some transfer of training from the *pa-ku* form to other prose and poetic forms. But, it must also be admitted that skill with a poetic form, Tang dynasty measured verse for example, is most efficiently acquired by directly targeting that form for study, not some other form which simply borrows some of its principles.

B. Purist Arguments

Among Ming scholars were those who were genuinely interested in philosophy and the classics, and among them, were those whose interest was enhanced by the study of *pa-ku* essays, and who even considered some examples of *pa-ku* essay composition to be works of art. According to

Plaks, Li Chih 李贄 (1527-1602), Yuan Hung-tao 袁宏道(1568-1610), Li Yu 李漁 (1611-1680), and Chiao Hsun 焦循(1763-1820) all considered the *pa-ku* form to be a major poetic form.[14] Let us call those who treated instances of the *pa-ku* essay form as art "purists."

Ju-lin wai-shih provides us with glimpses of the lives of several purists. For example, compiler Lu's daughter never even glanced at the poems, odes, elegies, and songs sent to her by admirers:

> . . . giving the various anthologies of poetry in the house to her maids to read, and occasionally asking them to compose a few verses for fun.[15]

On the other hand:

> Her dressing table and embroidery-stand were stacked with essays, and everyday she annotated and punctuated a few.[16]

Although Lu's daughter knows that the *pa-ku* essay is an instrument of official recognition and success, yet she herself has no hope of securing an official career. In the absence of any such instrumental benefit, what explains her continued interest in these essays? Was she a purist? Or was she assisting her father in his work? I suggest that both are the case.

Ma Ch'un-shang is a purist who, like compiler Lu's daughter, loves his work. He is, however, criticized by Wei Ti-shan 衛體善 and Sui Ts'en-an 隨岑庵 for ignoring standards 法則 in his selection of essays.

Wei and Sui have been editing essays in Chekiang for twenty years. This year, however, they claim that because none of the examination essays "come up to standard," they have not selected any as "models of criticism." Both Wei and Sui are purists who insist on high standards. But when challenged by K'uang Ch'ao-jen to say what those standards are, however, neither Wei nor Sui can say clearly. The best Wei can do is claim:

> . . . only those essays selected and annotated by us are assured of immortality.[17]

Sui's answer is even more laughable:

> We [purists] are not afraid of not passing the examinations,

> friend. Our one fear is lest our three essays should not stand up to criticism *after* we have passed. . . .[18]

These answers contrast sharply with Ma Ch'un-shan's answer to the same question. When asked by Chu Hsien-fu to identify his chief criterion for selecting essays Ma answers immediately: 文章總以理法爲主 "In an essay the reasoning is always primary."

C. Criticisms of *Pa-Ku* Prose

In addition to instrumentalist and purist defenses of the *pa-ku* essay, we also encounter critics of the form. From the stand point of the student, the many rules of *pa-ku* composition restricted freedom of expression, and hence, freedom of thought. The examiners' answer to this criticism is that the rules *did* restrict thinking, but that they did so in useful ways, ways that enabled them objectively to evaluate the candidates. The challenge of writing *pa-ku* prose, they claimed, brought out in clear relief a student's cognitive skills and willingness to conform.

The *pa-ku* essay promised different things to different people. To some it symbolized "golden mansions," to others it held out the hope of security, power, and the status of serving the emperor. These were powerful motives, and they sometimes enticed people into a monomaniacal study of *pa-ku* prose. Rigid unwavering interest in a single literary form has already been encountered in Compiler Lu's daughter and in Chou Chin. It is difficult to know what motivates Lu's daughter. Chou Chin, however, is so caught up in the status that derives from being a servant of the empire that he ignores all other prose and poetic forms as being "heterodox" and "superficial." With Chou Chin in mind, the criticism that the *pa-ku* essay requirement of the civil service examinations caused people to be one-dimensional in their knowledge of Chinese literature and philosophy is one that may, I think, be reasonably raised. For Chou's literary breadth and intellectual depth of field have been greatly diminished by his exclusive focus on *pa-ku* composition. One may even go so far as to agree with Liu Ta-chieh that for some people extensive study of *pa-ku* prose ". . . made people stupid."

One of Chou Chin's examinees, it will be recalled, wanted to show Chou his skill in composing poems in the styles of both the Han and the Tang dynasties. Chou tells the student that only by studying *pa-ku* essays

can he hope to pass the examinations. We may suppose that there were many who found themselves in the position of this student. Some of them, no doubt, were willing to compromise their standards, conform, even limit their intellectual horizons, all for the lure of "success."[19]

Some critics opposed conformity to *pa-ku* prose style as the standard for examination essays, and criticised the orthodox reliance on Chu Hsi's commentaries on the classics. Many of these critics were motivated not by instrumental considerations, but by an idealistic regard for truth and freedom of expression. One such character from *Ju-lin wai-shih*, a major figure of the novel, is Tu Shao-ching 杜少卿.

Tu is a purist in the sense that he has no desire for official rank or wealth. His reputation as a "wastrel," however, is well earned. Not only has he squandered the fortune he inherited from his family, he spends much of his time with Buddhist priests, Taoists, artisans, and beggars. But Tu also has a genuine interest in the study of the Confucian classics. He reads commentaries other than those of Chu Hsi, and has written his own commentary on the *Book of Songs*. But why does Tu refuse to sit for the exams? I submit it is because of his commitment to intellectual freedom and truth. Tu not only believes that the acceptance of Chu Hsi's commentaries as orthodox unnecessarily restricts philosophical thinking, he thinks that in some cases they are simply mistaken:

> "And what do you gentlemen think of 'The Lady Says: The Cock Has Crowed?' " asked Tu.
>
> "That is one of the poems of the state of Cheng," said Ma Chun-shang. "Surely all it means is that she was chaste."[20]
>
> "I don't agree," said Tu. "The thing is that those scholars who hanker secretly after becoming officials want to cut a fine figure before wives. Their wives again, who want to become great ladies but can't, find fault with everything and quarrel the whole time with their husbands. Look at this couple, though. They haven't the slightest desire for official rank. They play the lyre and drink, completely contented with their lot. This is how true gentlemen of the first three dynasties regulated themselves and their families. But no other commentators have pointed this out.[21]

The limitation of essay topics to the *Four Books* is another way in

which creative philosophical exposition was restrained in the composition of *pa-ku* essays. The result was that individuals with divergent philosophical persuasions were discouraged from considering other traditions: Han Fei-tzu 韓非子 and the Legalists, for example, or Mo Ti 墨翟 and his school. Moreover, there was little opportunity to explore new and uncharted territory.

D. Conclusion

In this section an attempt has been made to survey various instrumentalist and purist apologies for the *pa-ku* essay, and to assess some of the criticisms raised against the use of *pa-ku* prose style as the standard for examination essays. Instrumentalist arguments can be given from the standpoint of the student and the examiner. For the student, skill in *pa-ku* essay composition leads to wealth and status. For the examiner, the *pa-ku* essay is a measure of the student's intellectual abilities and willingness to conform, but not necessarily a measure of character. Purist arguments transcend the normal expectations of students and examiners. Purists grant the instrumental value of the *pa-ku* essay, but insist further that the *pa-ku* prose form is a unique genre of literature, and that certain examples of *pa-ku* prose are works of art.

One of the major criticisms of the *pa-ku* prose composition requirement of the civil service examinations is that it restricted the focus of its students' literary and philosophical horizons too narrowly. It caused some serious students of *pa-ku* prose to ignore other poetic and prose genres, such as the styles of Han and T'ang. In addition to diminishing literary breadth, it caused many to compromise their ideological convictions, and to limit their philosophical explorations. It is true that there was an enormous payoff to those with ability who were willing to compromise their principles. But there were also others who refused to compromise. Tu Shao-ching is one of them, and this, in my opinion, makes him one of the heros of *Ju-lin wai-shi*.

For further insight into the nature of *pa-ku* prose, I have included a section below which translates and comments on the essay of a student who received his Chin-shih 進士 degree during the Chia-ching 嘉靖 period of the Ming.

III. Translation and Notes on a *pa-ku* essay

Ch'u Ching-ch'un 瞿景淳 (d. 1569) rose to positions as vice president

of the Board of Ceremonies, Chancellor of the Han-lin Academy, and chief editor for the second transcription of the *Yung-lo ta-tien.* Below is my translation of his essay, "That which is mandated by Heaven is called NATURE."

According to Plaks, a typical "eight limbed" essay may have as few as three hundred or as many as six hundred words. The essay analyzed below has six hundred seventy-six characters. Longer essays, such as this one, are apt to increase not only the length but the number of the rhetorical units that comprise it. Ch'u's essay consists of ten such units. Although the number and length of the rhetorical units of a given essay may vary, the occurrence of at least eight of those units in accord with fixed rules of composition is mandatory.

Ch'u's essay deals with a number of multi-layered issues such as: "the mandate (will) of heaven" or fate, the acceptance of fate or "following the Way of Heaven," the tension between one's (Heaven given) "nature" or natural endowments on the one hand and self-cultivation and personal "effort" on the other, or more simply, the interplay of fate and personal will.

Ch'u's topic 天命之謂性 is the opening sentence of Tzu Ssu's *Doctrine of the Mean.* All interpretation of topics drawn from the *Four Books* and *Five Classics* has to be based on the commentaries of Chu Hsi.

The sequence of formal rhetorical units which constitute the *pa-ku* form begins with a section known as *P'o T'i* 破題 or "Breaking open the topic." In this section the writer must reveal his knowledge of the essay title's source without directly citing the full passage from which it is drawn, or any section of the commentary on it. According to Ching-I Tu the *P'o T'i* ". . . should be written in only two sentences." Plaks adds that the sentences should be parallel. Yokoda 横田輝俊 claims that the *P'o T'i* can have as many as three sentences, but does not mention parallelism. Ch'u's essay below utilizes three sentences in the *P'o T'i,* and none of them are parallel.

天 命 之 謂 性

"That which is mandated by Heaven is called NATURE"

1. *P'o T'i* 破題 or "Breaking open the topic"[22]

   1) 論道原於天
   It is said: "Heaven is the origin of the Way,"

   2) 而君子體之以贊乎天
   and: "The Superior Man comprehends It and thereby provides Heaven with assistance."

3) 可以觀其理之一矣
By following (the way) the singularity of the principles (of things) can be seen.

2. *Ch'eng T'i* 承題 "Carrying the topic forward"[23]
1) 夫天人之理通一而無二者也
The principles of Heaven and Man are one and the same; (they are) not two diverse principles.
2) 始焉命之於天
In the beginning (the way) is mandated by Heaven.
3) 終以成能於己
In the end (It) becomes an ability of one's own.
4) 則夫體道之功
5) 君子其容自諉耶
Such being the case, then, how could it be permissible for The Superior Man to excuse himself from making an effort to comprehend the Way?

3. *Ch'i Chiang* 起講 "Opening statement"[24]
1) 昔子思憂斯道之不明
Formerly, *Tzu Ssu* worried about the way not being clearly understood,
2) 而人多以私自累其心也
and about people, in many cases, burdening their minds with selfishness.
3) 乃言此以詔之曰
Therefore, he discussed these (matters) in order to instruct (people), saying:
4) 吾人之心本與天地萬物相爲流通者也
Originally our human mind circulates about Heaven, Earth, and the Ten Thousand Things.
5) 自夫體道者
When (trying) to comprehend the Way,
6) 不以吾心盡天地萬物之靈
if our mind is not used to exhaust completely the measure of Heaven, Earth, and the Ten Thousand Things,
7) 而以天地萬物之形告其心
but is instead shackled by their appearance,
8) 斯岐天人而二之也
then (we) split Heaven and Man into two things.

4. *Ling T'i* 領題 "Taking up the topic"
   1) 不觀夫道之所從來與其終之所極至乎
   Don't we see the source from which the Way arises, and the end toward which It is heading?
   2) 今夫道爲何者
   Just what is the action of the Way?
5. *Ch'i Ku* 起股 "Opening limb"[25]
   a 1) 道率諳性而性命諳天者也
   The Way is followed by (following) our (human) Nature which is mandated by Heaven.
   b 2) 非外鑠我也
   It is not an embellishment external to ourselves.
   a 3) 道行於教而教修夫道者也
   The Way is practiced in accord with Teachings by which It is restored.
   b 4) 我固有之也
   The self originally possesses It (the Way).
   c 5) 天下無一物而非道
   Since nothing under Heaven is not the Way,
   c 6) 則亦無一物而非我矣
   there is nothing which is not also the self.
   7) 道誠不可須臾離也
   The Way truly should not be left (even) for a moment.
   8) 人可離道以爲學乎
   (For) can one leave the Way yet suppose that one is studying (It)?
   9) 是故由教而入道者有不息之功焉
   Hence, one who enters the Way out of instruction never relaxes his effort.
6. *Hsu Ku* 虛股 "Empty limb"[26]
   a 1) 時乎不睹不聞也
   Sometimes (the Way) is invisible and inaudible,
   b 2)若可離矣
   as though (one) may get away from it.
   c 3)然天理不違於動靜
   But, whether (one) is active or at rest, there is no departing from the Heavenly Principle.
   d 4) 故君子之戒懼以存乎天命之性者如何也

How can the Superior Man not be on guard and fearful in order to preserve the Nature mandated (to Him) by Heaven?

e 5) 而豈待於徵色發聲也哉
Must (one) wait to verify (Its) color and sound?

a 6) 時乎莫見莫顯也
Sometimes (the Way) is invisible and is not manifest,

b 7) 若可離矣
as though (one) may get away from (It).

c 8) 然人心無間於幾微
But, with regard to what is minute and obscure, the human mind (should allow) no lacuna.

d 9) 故君子之愼獨以行夫率性之道者何如也
How can the Superior Man not be careful when alone in order to practice and follow the Way of (his) Nature?

e 10) 而豈待於至見至顯也哉
Must he wait for what is visible and prominent?

11) 是非道之本離乎人
It is not that the Way originally is something that is separate from man,

12) 而君子故爲是不可離之功也
and that the merit of the Superior Man consists in making It inseparable.

13) 蓋以斯道之神流行於天地萬物
Rather, it is that the spirit of the Way permeates Heaven, Earth, and the Ten Thousand Things,

14) 而實充足於吾之一心
and actually fills our mind.

7. *Chung Ku* 中股 "Middle parallel"[27]

a 1) 以言乎心之未發也
The mind which is not aroused (with feelings),

b 2) 寂然不動而已
it is at rest and simply unmoved.

c 3) 然吾心絕偏倚之私
Thus, when our mind breaks away from the prejudices of bias and inclination,

d 4) 而一中足以貫天下之道矣
one word, "impartiality," suffices (to characterize) truly the Way under Heaven.

e 5) 道之體在吾心也
The essence of the Way is within our mind.

f 6) 戒懼其容已乎
Can we stop being watchful and afraid?

a 7) 以言乎心之未發也
The mind which is aroused,

b 8) 感之遂通而已
responds to (what arouses) it simply by opening up (a Way).

c 9) 然順應協賞然之則
Thus, following principles of appropriate cooperation with nature,

d 8) 而一和足以類萬物之情矣
one word, "harmony," suffices to encompass the situation of the 10,000 things.

e 9) 道之用在吾心也
The function of the Way is within our mind.

f 10) 愼獨其容已乎
How can we stop being cautious when alone?

11) 人惟體之有未盡
Although some people have an incomplete understanding of this,

12) 斯
that (viz. their incomplete understanding)

g 13) 無與於天地
has nothing to do with Heaven and Earth.

g 14) 無閒於萬物耳
(and) is unrelated to the 10,000 things.

8. *Hou Ku* 後股 "Back parallel"[28]

1) 誠能
If one really can:

a 2) 戒懼至中
be watchful, afraid, achieve impartiality,

b 3) 而天命之存日益固
preserve the heavenly nature, and strengthen it daily,

a 4) 愼獨致和
(if one really can) be prudent when alone, achieve harmony,

b 5) 而率性之行日益廣
and daily broaden behavior which follows nature,

6) 則
then:

c 7) 天地吾同體也
Heaven, Earth, and oneself will all have the same essence,

d 8) 以心感心
so that by using mind to respond to mind,

e 9) 乾坤不毀
Heaven and Earth will not be destroyed

f 10) 而安其故矣
but will stay fixed,

c 11) 萬物吾同用也
(and moreover) the 10,000 things will have the same function as oneself,

d 12) 以順召順
so that by complying (to things, things will be) in compliance,

e 13) 品彙咸享
all sentient beings will prosper,

f 14) 而若其生矣
and will fulfill their lives,

9. *Shu Pi* 束比 "Tying parallel"[29]

1) 是
Therefore

a 2) 其始也天以此理而賦於吾人
In the beginning Heaven endowed us with this principle.

a 3) 其終也吾人以此理而贊乎天地
In the end we use this principle to assist Heaven and Earth.

b 4) 道非有餘也
The Way does not exceed (the mind).

b 5) 心非不足也
The mind is not inadequate (in following the Way).

10. *Lo Hsia* 落下 "Postlude"[30]

1) 而人之不能盡道於心者
If someone can not fully grasp the Way in his mind,

2) 心之自小耳
just because his mind is small,

3) 非道之罪也
this is not the fault of the Way.

4) 子思首言及此
Tzu Ssu's being the first to speak of this,

5) 憂道之情見矣
shows his feeling of concern about the Way (not being fully understood).

Notes

1. After criticizing the Ming ruling class for using the *pa-ku* essay form as an instrument for consolidating political power in a feudalistic political system, Liu claims: ...以八股取士科舉制度，這是毒辣的限制思想的愚民政策。 See 中國文學發展史, Vol. 3, p. 100.
2. Tu, Ching-I, "The Chinese Examination Essay: Some Literary Considerations," *Monumenta Serica,* Vol. XXXI, 1974-75, p. 394.
3. Wu Ching-tzu, *The Scholars,* trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1983), p. 149.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
10. Franke, Wolfgang, *The Reform and Abolition of the Traditional Chinese Examination System* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 29.
11. Plaks, Andrew H., "The Prose of Our Time," presented at the Conference on Chinese Cultural History, Princeton University, May 15, 1987., p. 17.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
13. Wu Ching-tzu, p. 123.
14. Plaks, p. 1.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
18. *Ibid.*
19. According to Herbert Franke, "Down to the Southern Sung the development of a candidate's own ideas within the general frame of Confucian ideology may have been possible. But after Chu Hsi's Neo-Confucian interpretation of the Confucian classics was adopted as state dogma, there remained almost no opportunity for the development of original ideas, for any deviation from the orthodox interpretation led certainly to failure." Franke, p. 13.
20. This is Chu Hsi's interpretation of "the cock has crowed."
21. *Op. cit.*, p. 378.
22 Yokoda notes that the final sentence of the *P'o T'i* must end with one of the following classical Chinese particles: 焉，也，矣，已，而已 or 者也。
23. Tu says that the *Ch'eng T'i* consists of "four or five sentences." Yokoda sets the limits of its range at three and six sentences. Plaks notes that as many as seven

sentences may be involved. Parallelism in this section is optional. Ch'u neglects it. The *Ch'eng T'i* clarifies the topic of the sage-author by discussing it in further detail. The sage-author also reveals in this section the broad outlines of the topic he intends to discuss. The technique is described by 瞿兌之 as "opening the door to reveal the mountain"開門見山 .

In the *Ch'eng T'i* the author must employ some of the final particles that may occur in the *P'o T'i* as well as other "vapid particles" 虛字. In addition, initial particles such as 夫 and 蓋 must be used in this section. Use of classical particles with exclamatory force, supports the author's required rhetorical posture in both of these sections to "speak with the voice of the sage" 代聖賢立言 。

24. In the sections following the *Ch'eng T'i,* the author abandons the voice of the sage and begins to speak in his "own voice." He attempts, among other things, to outline and highlight the main topics to be dealt with in the major limbs of the essay. The length of the opening statement is substantial, and may range from seven to as many as ten sentences. Ch'u's opening statement shows that parallelism was not a requirement of this section.

In his first sentence Ch'u mentions the sage author, in this case: Tzu Ssu 子 思, by name, thereby signaling a transition to his own voice. But rhetorically, and especially philosophically, this transition proves to be insignificant. For the author's voice merely clarifies, complements, and amplifies the sage's voice. The author is wholely supportive, not skeptical; he considers no position other than that of the sage, is slavishly uncritical in his treatment of that position, skims over the surface of its latent difficulties, and attempts no clarification of obscurity, and no refinement of position.

25. This is the first section of the essay where parallelism is required. It is also required in the next four sections. These four sections express the author's most important ideas. Each section contains two segments of parallel prose, making a total of eight parallel segments. Although parallel segments may occur in other sections of an essay, the eight segments of these four sections are the eight limbs or legs of the essay. The parallelism of these sections facilitates the use of "analogy" and "contrast" in these sections. Parallel sentences need not be contiguous as in 4) and 5) but may be interspersed as in 1) and 3).
26. The sequence of sentences 1) through 5) are parallel to the sequence 6) through 10).
27. The parallelism of this section is similar to the last. Two segments of sequentially parallel sentences are followed by a segment in which the sentences are either not parallel, or are only loosely parallel.
28. The parallelism in this section is complicated. The section is a complex conditional comprised of a segment of parallel sentences constituting the antecedent and one constituting the consequent.
29. This is an optional section.
30. In moving through the various sections, a good essay progresses imperceptibly through a series of movements 起承轉合 "introduction, follow-up, transition, and conclusion." This section of the essay is more like a postlude, or leaving behind of impressions than a conclusion.

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