

The Unique Value of the Instructions of Du Family in Bincheng, Shandong Province and Reflection on Family Instruction Works

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ABSTRACT

Family instructions are an indispensable part of the excellent cultural heritage of the Chinese nation. The Instructions of Du Family in Bincheng, Shandong has a relatively rigorous internal logic. In the narrative process, there is a contrast between positive and negative aspects, and a connection between them, reflecting the author's dialectical thinking and development perspective. This book collection embodies the educational philosophy and family instructions of the Du family in Binzhou, and has important material value for understanding the family education of ancient big families. It is also of great reference significance for the development of individuals and society today.

Keywords: *“Instructions of Du Family”, Dialectical thinking, Family instruction values.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Du family in Bincheng, Shandong, flourished for a long time during the Ming and Qing dynasties. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, there were 347 members of his family who achieved fame and fortune, including 8 juren (a successful candidate in the imperial examinations at the provincial level), 12 jinshi (a successful candidate in the highest imperial examinations), and more than 100 officials of the seventh rank or above. The phenomenon of talented individuals emerging in the Du family is closely related to the family instruction “Instructions of Du Family”. By analyzing the framework structure, internal logic, and dialectical thinking of Du E's book “Instructions of Du Family”, people can see the educational philosophy, methods, and family motto ideas of Du E and the Du family. It can be seen that the secret of the longevity of the Du family during the Ming and Qing dynasties is still worth learning from for the education and development of individuals and society today.

2. THE UNIQUE VALUE OF “INSTRUCTIONS OF DU FAMILY” AMONG MANY FAMILY INSTRUCTIONS

Family instructions have a long history in China and are an indispensable part of China's excellent traditional culture. Family instructions can be divided into three categories based on their content: the imperial family instructions, the family instructions of scholars, and the admonishment for women. The admonitions for women, such as Ban Zhao's "The Women's Admonitions," are based on the premise of recognizing the different division of labor between men and women, obeying male power, and aiming to take care of the husband, educate the children, and maintain family harmony; The family precepts of emperors throughout history, such as Emperor Taizong Li Shimin's "Emperor's Standards" and "Admonitions to the Imperial Family", Ming Taizu Zhu Yuanzhang's "Emperor Mingzu's Instructions", and Emperor Kangxi's "Maxims of Court Instructions", have had a profound impact on politics due to the centralized monarchy system where "the emperor has no personal affairs". And the family instructions of successive ministers are all based on summarizing

personal experiences and lessons learned from previous generations. Such works as Zhuge Liang's "Admonitions to My Son" during the Shu Han period of the Three Kingdoms, Yan Zhitui's "The Family Instructions of Master Yan" during the Northern and Southern Dynasties, Sima Guang's "Instructions for Frugality and Health" during the Northern Song Dynasty, Zhu Bolu's "Zhu Family Instructions", Zeng Guofan's "The Family Letters of Zeng Guofan", including the "Du Family Instructions" discussed in this article, are all accessible and usable for ordinary scholars and families, and therefore have more vitality today.

Among the many instructions of scholars mentioned above, many concepts such as valuing morality, advocating frugality, and being kind to others have been universal principles since the Han Dynasty's "expulsion of all schools of thought and exclusive respect for Confucianism". So, what is the value of repeating these concepts?

Firstly, these principles are often theoretical summaries of one's own life and practice. Although these concepts belong to the category of "repeated inventions" compared to previous sages, they have added one's own understanding and summary of life; Secondly, from the perspective of general acceptance, the impact of thoughts triggered by words spoken by distant people is not as significant as the influence of words spoken by those around them. Although the social environment is always changing, concepts such as being proactive, frugal, being kind to others, and integrating knowledge with action can transcend time and space, and still have brilliant vitality today.

Compared to many other family instructions, the book "Instructions of Du Family" provides more comprehensive, profound, and specific reflections on education. Through reading and summarizing, it can be seen that Du E's views on educational objectives, content, and methods are not general.

In terms of educational objectives, Du E took Confucianism as the dominant ideology and hoped that his descendants can become gentlemen with both moral integrity and talent, with the goal of becoming "talents of three generations". To become a gentleman with both virtue and talent, Du E believed that the first thing to pay attention to is the issue of determination.

Besides the prerequisite of determination, how can one become a gentleman with both virtue and talent?

First, to be manifested as "knowing love and respect", one must possess a great love heart of "the unity of all things". This concept of "heaven and earth as the heart" and "the unity of all things" is similar to Zhang Zai and Yangming's philosophy of mind, with a very broad realm.

Second, people should be kind to others. The goodness of Confucianism can be divided into two aspects: one is that "one should not impose things that one does not want to happen on others", and the other is that "if one wants to establish oneself, one should also make others establish oneself; if one wants to be enlightened, one should also make others enlightened." The former is hated by everyone, while the latter is favored by everyone.

Third, in terms of official career, one should have full respect for their position. Virtue is not worthy of position, there will be disasters. Holding down a job without doing a stroke of work is not allowed; Harming one side, humiliating ancestors, and even more are also not allowed.

Fourth, in order to prevent deviations, Du E proposed two methods of "self-restraint and consideration of things", namely restraining personal desires and putting oneself in others' shoes, emphasizing the need to put oneself in others' shoes and think from others' perspectives

3. THE EDUCATIONAL METHODS IN "INSTRUCTIONS OF DU FAMILY"

In order to ensure that his descendants can achieve the goal of being both virtuous and talented gentlemen, Du E also proposed several very useful educational methods.

The first method is to seize the critical opportunity for teenagers to receive education. Du E said in the 2nd Article: "Good behavior habits formed in childhood are as solid as those born naturally. The plasticity of children's brain function is relatively high, not only making it easy to accept new things, but also forming habits." In the 14th article, the importance of laying a foundation during adolescence is mentioned again.

The second method is for parents and brothers to set an example. The 5th Article analyzes self-cultivation, child rearing, and family harmony has already mentioned the importance of fathers and brothers serving as role models. Later, in the eighth analysis, Du E quoted Mencius' words: "Those with good moral cultivation can educate and nurture

those with insufficient moral cultivation; those with talent can educate and nurture those without talent." This confirms the importance of fathers and brothers serving as role models, and the 9th Article once again emphasizes the importance of example over words, with fathers and brothers taking the lead.

The third method is to emphasize the transformative role of education in the educational process. In the 13th Article, Du E first acknowledged that in terms of learning talent, "people should choose different paths according to their own conditions and make the most of their talents." The only way is constantly cultivating and transforming it from bad to good, and constantly changing. Du E saw the differences in talent, but at the same time, he also recognized that even those with high talent have certain shortcomings. Therefore, the value of education lies in its transformation process from "not good" to "good".

The fourth method is to cherish time. Du E said in the 27th Article: "Today, look at yesterday, yesterday has passed; tomorrow, look at today, today has passed. Life is only a few decades, how much time is there? Wasting time when young, people always think that the future is long; Looking back in old age, time is as fleeting as an instant." Sighing at the passing of time and the passing of white horses is often the mentality of middle-aged and elderly people. Young people always feel that spring and autumn are prosperous, and time is slow. When people look back in shock, they are already a hundred years old, but they are unable to keep up, so they must cherish time.

The fifth method is to avoid indulging in comfort and relaxation during the learning process. Du E reminded his family in the 45th Article to always be vigilant and not to seek comfort. Heartbeat, once thought of, the path becomes different. In order to avoid a lack of concentration and chaotic thoughts, Du E deeply abhorred gambling and issued a serious warning.

From this, it can be seen that Du E's educational goals are detailed, the educational content is rich, and the educational methods are effective. It can be said that his educational ideas and methods are relatively mature and worth learning from.

According to the calculation of 30 years as one generation, the Du family, consisting of over 600 years and more than 20 generations in the Ming and Qing dynasties, repeatedly practiced Chinese style in the imperial examinations, becoming a scholarly

family that has been passed down from generation to generation. They have far escaped the curse of the development of ancient Chinese families, such as "the brilliance of a gentleman is cut off after five generations" and "wealth cannot exceed three generations". The book "Instructions of Du Family" has great practical reference significance for self-moral cultivation, knowledge construction, being kind to others, and restraining oneself and things today.

4. INSPIRATION AND REFLECTION FROM FAMILY INSTRUCTIONS

From the perspective of historical cycles, whether it is the family teachings meticulously summarized by knowledgeable scholars and officials, or the ancestral teachings earnestly taught by successive emperors and kings, they have not been able to change the fate of the decline of the family and dynasty. This phenomenon requires reflection.

From the perspective of the family, due to uncontrollable external factors such as war, banditry, epidemics, or population growth, the younger generations gradually forget the teachings of their ancestors over time, or only know the so-called "family rules" and say one thing and do another, resulting in a serious deviation from the "unity of knowledge and action", leading to extravagance, laziness, eating, drinking, prostitution, and gambling, and ultimately leading to decline.

In the Tang Dynasty, Ming Dynasty, and Qing Dynasty, which had imperial family instructions, after the An Lushan Rebellion, the Tang Dynasty was plagued by regional separatism, eunuch autocracy, and factional disputes. Among the heirs, there was Emperor Xizong of Tang who was notorious for his reputation and disregard for the lives of the people; Emperor Zhengde of the Ming Dynasty regarded national affairs as a child's play, practiced alchemy and Taoism during the Jiajing period, neglected work during the Wanli period, and lost his ambition after the Tianqi period. This led to the disaster of the Women's Temple and factional disputes; After the Kangxi and Yongzheng reigns of the Qing Dynasty, they followed the old ways, became blindly arrogant, closed their eyes and ears, and became corrupt officials. They were vulnerable to external forces and were eventually overthrown by the people.

Li Shimin, Zhu Yuanzhang, and Aisin Gioro Xuanye drew on the experience and lessons of their predecessors to write "Emperor's Standards", "Emperor Ming's Ancestral Instructions", and "Maxims of Court Instructions", but they were still unable to free their own dynasties from being overthrown.

One of the reasons is the problem of thinking level, that is, the inability to view changes in the external world with a developmental perspective, and the failure to grasp the fundamental laws of social change. As Zhu Yuanzhang stated in the preface of the "Emperor Ming's Ancestral Instructions": "All my descendants must respectfully inherit my will, do not act arrogantly, disturb the laws I have already established, and not change a word."¹ If future emperors and descendants do not understand how to investigate and study the constantly changing reality, seek truth from facts, and blindly follow the specific rules and regulations set by their ancestors, they will inevitably fall into the trap of carving boats and seeking swords, and waiting for rabbits, let alone those debauched and incompetent people.

The second issue is the stance and motivation. Taking the Ming and Qing dynasties as an example, Zhu Yuanzhang's "Emperor Ming's Ancestral Instructions" clearly stipulated the super national treatment of the descendants of the Ming dynasty royal family, allowing the Ming dynasty feudal lords to enjoy luxury. The population growth of the imperial family was twice that of the Ming dynasty, and by the mid to late Ming dynasty, it became an unbearable financial burden for the Ming dynasty. At the same time, the living standards of the people have been hovering and even significantly declining. After the outbreak of the peasant uprising, the peasant army launched the "Killing Zhu Movement" for logistical supply. The children of the Eight Banners in the Qing Dynasty also became idle people with loyal crops, transforming into parasites of society; At the same time, the emperors of the Qing Dynasty gathered multiple generations of national strength to build the Yuanmingyuan, which was luxurious and only for the enjoyment of the emperors. After the Yuanmingyuan was plundered and burned by the British and French coalition forces, the remaining movable objects were also carried away by the surrounding people.

1. (Ming Dynasty) Zhu Yuanzhang, Emperor Ming's Ancestral Instructions, Ming engraved edition. Right on page 1.

When neighbors and villagers are in a state of extreme poverty, once the situation changes, the wealth and glory of a family may bring more serious destructive consequences such as digging three feet of land, robbing tombs and opening coffins; When a dynasty's rule is only aimed at maintaining the elegance and wealth of the royal family and ruling class, and cannot allow everyone to share the fruits and dividends of labor and development, it will trigger serious social division, opposition, and violent behavior, thereby causing tremendous damage to social productivity. This will force the process of civilization to hover at a low level in the cycle of "division and unity", unable to cultivate a more stable and developed economic model, a fairer and more reasonable management system, or a more advanced technological level.

5. CONCLUSION

Du Mu wrote in his poem "On the E Pang Palace": "The rulers of Qin did not have time to mourn their own downfall, but they made their descendants mourn for it. If future generations lament it without taking it as a lesson, then they will have to let future generations lament them." "Creative inheritance and innovative development" is people's attitude towards traditional culture today. In the process of learning and inheriting family motto culture, it is necessary to abandon the details that are no longer in line with the times, understand its spiritual core, and fully draw lessons from the rise and fall of families and dynasties from a broader perspective.

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