

The Thousand Character Essay (Qian Zi Wen)

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Chapter 1

天地玄黃，宇宙洪荒。tian1 di4 xuan2 huang2, yu3 zhou4 hong2 huang1
The sky was black and earth yellow; space and time vast, limitless.

日月盈昃，辰宿列張。ri4 yue4 ying2 ze4, chen2 xiu4 lie4 zhang1
Sun high or low, moon full or parsed; with stars and lodges spread in place.

寒來暑往，秋收冬藏。han2 lai2 shu(3) wang3, qiu1 shou1 dong1 cang2
Cold arrives then heat once more; Autumn's harvest, Winter's store.

閏餘成歲，律呂調陽。run4 yu2 cheng2 sui4, lv4 lv3 tiao2 yang2
Extra days round out the years; scale in tune with sun and spheres.

雲騰致雨，露結為霜。yun2 teng2 zhi4 yu3, lu4 jie2 wei2 shuang1
Clouds soar up to end in rain; the dew congeals to morning frost.

金生麗水，玉出崑岡。jin1 sheng1 li4 shui3, yu4 chu1 kun1 gang1
Gold is born in the River Li; jade comes from Kunlun's vault.

劍號巨闕，珠稱夜光。jian4 hao4 ju4 que1, zhu1 cheng1 ye4 guang1
A sword is styled "Excalibur"; a pearl, the "Gleam of Night".

果珍李柰，菜重芥姜。guo3 zhen1 li3 nai4, cai4 zhong4 jie4 jiang1
Dearest fruit are pears and apples; fine crops mustard, ginger.

海咸河淡，鱗潛羽翔。hai3 xian2 he2 dan4, lin2 qian2 yu3 xiang2
Sea is saline, streams sublime; fish school below, birds flock on high.

Chapter 2

龍師火帝，鳥官人皇。long2 shi1 huo3 di4, niao3 guan1 ren2 huang2
Dragon Master, Fire King; Bird Official, Lord of Men.

始制文字，乃服衣裳。shi3 zhi4 wen2 zi4, nai3 fu2 yi1 shang1
The beginning of writing; what's more, wearing clothes.

推位讓國，有虞陶唐。tui1 wei4 rang4 guo2, you3 yu2 tao2 tang2
Yielding the throne, passing the land; rulers of Yu2, Tao2 and Tang2.

弔民伐罪，周發殷湯。diao4 min2 fa2 zui4, zhou1 fa1 yin1 tang1
Relieve the people, right the wrong; as did Zhou1 Fa1, as did Yin1-Tang1.

坐朝問道，垂拱平章。zuo4 chao2 wen4 dao4, chui2 gong3 ping2 zhang1
Presiding at court and asking the Way; gracious yet lordly, discuss and decide.

愛育黎首，臣伏戎羌。ai4 yu4 li2 shou3, chen2 fu2 rong2 qiang1
With love he taught the dark and soiled; in submission, wild tribes.

遐邇一體，率賓歸王。xia2 er3 yi4 ti3, shuai4 bin1 gui1 wang2

Far and near, they joined as one; all followed, rallied to the king.

鳴鳳在竹，白駒食場。ming2 feng4 zai4 zhu2, bai2 ju1 shi2 chang2

The phoenix calls from bamboo stand; White pony grazes pasture land.

化被草木，賴及萬方。hua4 bei4 cao3 mu4, lai4 ji2 wan4 fang1

Wise teachings dress each plant and tree; bounty everywhere we see.

Chapter 3

蓋此身髮，四大五常。gai4 ci3 shen1 fa4, si4 da4 wu3 chang2

These bodies and this hair of ours; Four Great Things, Five Principles.

恭惟鞠養，豈敢毀傷。gong1 wei2 ju1 yang3, qi(3) gan(3) hui3 shang1

Do honor to your upbringing; how dare one inflict a wound!

女慕貞絜，男效才良。nv3 mu4 zhen1 jie2, nan2 xiao4 cai2 liang2

Girls admire the chaste and pure; boys, the talented and good.

知過必改，得能莫忘。zhi1 guo4 bi4 gai3, de2 neng2 mo4 wang4

Aware of wrong, you must then change; mind the limits of your strength.

罔談彼短，靡恃己長。wang3 tan2 bi(3) duan3, mi2 shi4 ji3 chang2

Refrain from talk of others' faults; don't rest upon your strengths.

信使可覆，器欲難量。xin4 shi(3) ke3 fu4, qi4 yu4 nan2 liang4

Words must stand the test of proof; good deeds are hard to weigh.

墨悲絲染，詩讚羔羊。mo4 bei1 si4 ran3, shi1 zan4 gao1 yang2

Mozi wept that the silk was dyed; in the Poems the lamb was glorified.

景行維賢，克念作聖。jing3 xing2 wei2 xian2, ke4 nian4 zuo4 sheng4

Exalted go only the wise and good; control desire, achieve sagehood.

德建名立，形端表正。de2 jian4 ming2 li4, xing2 duan1 biao3 zheng4

Virtue built, good name made; figure upright, bearing straight.

空谷傳聲，虛堂習聽。kong1 gu3 chuan2 sheng1, xu1 tang2 xi2 ting1

The empty valleys broadly resonate; in hollow halls wisely officiate.

禍因惡積，福緣善慶。huo4 yin1 e4 ji1, fu2 yuan2 shan4 qing4

Calamity's caused by evil stored; blessings result as good's reward.

尺璧非寶，寸陰是競。chi3 bi4 fei1 bao3, cun4 yin1 shi4 jing4

A foot of jade is no treasure; an inch of time is to fight for.

資父事君，曰嚴與敬。zi1 fu4 shi4 jun1, yue1 yan2 yu3 jing4

Nourish your father and serve your king; known as reverence and respect.

孝當竭力，忠則盡命。xiao4 dang1 jie2 li4, zhong1 ze2 jin4 ming4

Devoted to parents with all your strength; loyal to throne with your very life.

臨深履薄，夙興溫清。lin2 shen1 lv3 bo2, su4 xing1 wen1 qing4

Like facing the deep, like treading thin ice; early to rise, warm and cool.

似蘭斯馨，如松之盛。si4 lan2 si1 xin1, ru2 song1 zhi1 sheng4

Like an orchid is this fragrance; like fresh pines, abundant, dense.

川流不息，淵澄取映。chuan1 liu2 bu4 xi1, yuan1 cheng2 qu3 ying4

The river flows at endless pace; in deepest pool behold the face.

容止若思，言辭安定。rong2 zhi3 ruo4 si1, yan2 ci2 an1 ding4

Stand solemnly and thoughtfully; speak with calm and dignity.

篤初誠美，慎終宜令。du3 chu1 cheng2 mei3, shen4 zhong1 yi2 ling4

Diligence at start indeed is fine; completeness at ending, duly grand.

榮業所基，藉甚無竟。rong2 ye4 suo3 ji1, ji2 shen4 wu2 jing4

Glorious works as the foundation, no limit to one's reputation.

學優登仕，攝職從政。xue2 you1 deng1 shi4, she4 zhi2 cong2 zheng4

Studies superior, step up to serve; be given your duties, join government's work.

存以甘棠，去而益詠。cun2 yi3 gan1 tang2, qu4 er2 yi4 yong3

Alive, under a sweet pear tree; gone, in song of eulogy.

樂殊貴賤，禮別尊卑。yue4 shu1 gui4 jian4, li3 bie2 zun1 bei1

Music distinct by social rank, rites according to prestige.

上和下睦，夫唱婦隨。shang4 he2 xia4 mu4, fu1 chang4 fu4 sui2

The higher is pleasing, the lower harmonious; the husband leads and the wife accompanies.

外受傳訓，入奉母儀。wai4 shou4 fu4 xun4, ru4 feng4 mu3 yi2

Outside, as teacher said you ought; at home, the rules your mother taught!

諸姑伯叔，猶子比兒。zhu1 gu1 bo2 shu1, you2 zi(3) bi3 er2

To each uncle and every aunt; as if you'd been their own infant.

孔懷兄弟，同氣連根。kong3 huai2 xiong1 di4, tong2 qi4 lian2 zhi1

Brothers cherish each other; united in the blood they share.

交友投分，切磨箴規。jiao1 you3 tou2 fen4, qie4 mo2 zhen1 gui1

In friendship each must do their share; "Qie mo!" the warning to beware.

仁慈隱惻，造次弗離。ren2 ci2 yin3 ce4, zao4 ci4 fu2 li2

Kindness, mercy, sympathy; Don't leave these in emergency.

節義廉退，顛沛匪虧。jie2 yi4 lian2 tui4, dian1 pei4 fei3 kui1

Righteous, just, honest, retiring; though in failure, never lacking.

性靜情逸，心動神疲。xing4 jing4 qing2 yi4, xin1 dong4 shen2 pi2

Nature settled, feelings mild; heart aroused, the spirit tired.

守真志滿，逐物意移。shou3 zhen1 zhi4 man3, zhu2 wu4 yi4 yi2

Keeping pure brings satisfaction; chasing things, the mind's distraction.

堅持雅操，好爵自縻。jian1 chi2 ya3 cao1, hao3 jue2 zi4 mi2

Hold fast to your high sentiments; a fine position will come from this.

Chapter 4

都邑華夏，東西二京。du1 yi4 hua2 xia4, dong1 xi1 er4 jing1
Ancient capitals, gorgeous and grand; East, Luoyang, and West, Chang'an.

背邙面洛，浮渭據涇。bei4 mang2 mian4 luo4, fu2 wei4 ju4 jing1
In back Mount Mang, front, River Luo; straddles Rivers Wei and Jing.

宮殿盤郁，樓觀飛驚。gong1 dian4 pan2 yu4, lou2 guan1 fei1 jing1
A swirl of palaces unwinding; view from buildings, fright from flying!

圖寫禽獸，畫彩仙靈。tu2 xie3 qin2 shou4, hua4 cai3 xian1 ling2
Depictions of the birds and beasts; painted fairies and spirits.

丙舍傍啟，甲帳對楹。bing3 she4 bang4 qi3, jia3 zhang4 dui4 ying2
Third Quarters' curtains open wide, fine drapes on pillars to the side.

肆筵設席，鼓瑟吹笙。si4 yan2 she4 xi2, gu3 se4 chui1 sheng1
Throwing banquets, lavish settings; playing flutes, percussion, strings.

升階納陛，弁轉疑星。sheng4 jie4 na4 bi4, bian4 zhuan4 yi2 xing1
Ascending stairs, to Emperor; hats awhirl, as if the stars.

右通廣內，左達承明。you4 tong1 guang3 nei4, zuo3 da2 cheng2 ming2
Right leads to the library, left, the scholars' dormitory.

既集墳典，亦聚群英。ji4 ji2 fen2 dian3, yi4 ju4 qun2 ying1
The legendary Fen2 and Dian3; stacks for use by famous men.

杜稿鍾隸，漆書壁經。du4 gao3 zhong1 li4, qi1 shu1 bi4 jing1
Du's cursive script and Zhong's print style, lacquer books, classics from wall.

府羅將相，路俠槐卿。fu3 luo2 jiang4 xiang4, lu4 jia2 huai2 qing1
Palace generals and ministers parade; on road outside the ones of lesser grade.

戶封八縣，家給千兵。hu4 feng1 ba1 xian4, jia1 ji3 qian1 bing1
Each household granted eight counties; each family, a thousand troops.

高冠陪輦，驅轂振纓。gao1 guan1 pei2 nian3, qu1 gu3 zhen4 ying1
High hats pace Son of Heaven's chariot; fast driving blows their ribbons all about.

世祿侈富，車駕肥輕。shi4 lu4 chi3 fu4, che1 jia4 fei2 qing1
Inheriting excessive wealth and ease; they drive fat horses anytime they please.

策功茂實，勒碑刻銘。ce4 gong1 mao4 shi2, le4 bei1 ke4 ming2
Wrote scrolls of glories and abundant facts; carved on stones their famous names and acts.

磻溪伊尹，佐時阿衡。pan2 xi1 yi1 yin3, zuo3 shi2 a1 heng2
Pan Creek, the place, Yi Yin, the man; assisting as Prime Minister.

奄宅曲阜，微旦孰營。yan3 zhai2 qu3 fu4, wei1 dan4 shu2 ying2
Yan's earth, Qufu; less Dan4, who would do?

桓公匡合，濟弱扶傾。huan2 gong1 kuang1 he2, ji4 ruo4 fu2 qing1
The Duke of Huan brought all in line; helped those weak and in decline.

綺回漢惠，說感武丁。qi3 hui2 han4 hui4, yue(3) gan(3) wu3 ding4
Qi returned to aid Han Hui; Delight affected Shang's Wu Ding.

俊乂密勿，多士寔寧。jun4 yi4 mi4 wu4, duo shi4 shi2 ning2
The best and brightest work diligently; so many fine men, this tranquility!

晉楚更霸，趙魏困橫。jin4 chu3 geng1 ba4, zhao4 wei4 kun4 heng2
Jin, Chu, next hegemonists; Zhao, Wei troubled by Axis.

假途滅虢，踐土會盟。jia3 tu2 mie4 guo2, jian4 tu3 hui4 meng2
Stole a march, wiped out Guo; occupied, made a pact.

何遵約法，韓弊煩刑。he2 zun1 yue1 fa3, han2 bi4 fan2 xing2
Xiao He valued simple laws; Han was framed and suffered torts.

起翦頗牧，用軍最精。qi(3) jian3 po1 mu4, yong4 jun1 zui4 jing1
Qi, Jian, Po and Mu; in use of armies, most refined.

宣威沙漠，馳譽丹青。xuan1 wei1 sha1 mo4, chi2 yu4 dan1 qing1
Spread of name to deserts far; passed down fame in portraiture.

九州禹跡，百郡秦并。jiu3 zhou1 yu3 ji4, bai3 jun4 qin2 bing4
Old Nine States with Yu's tracks in; the Hundred Districts, joined by Qin.

岳宗泰岱，禪主云亭。yue4 zong1 tai4 dai4, chan2 zhu3 yun2 ting2
Peak most worshipped, Great Taishan; Chan conducted on Yun and Ting.

雁門紫塞，雞田赤城。yan4 men2 zi3 sai4, ji1 tian2 chi4 cheng2
Mt Yanmen Pass, purple Great Wall; Jitian station, Chicheng's vault.

昆池碣石，鉅野洞庭。kun1 chi2 jie2 shi2, ju4 ye3 dong4 ting2
Kunming Pond, Tablet Rock; Juye Swamp, Lake Dongting.

曠遠綿邈，岩岫杳冥。kuang4 yuan3 mian2 miao3, yan2 xiu4 yao3 ming2
Rivers flowing without end, boundless lakes and seas; tall rocks in caves so dark and deep,
climate as you please.

Chapter 5

治本於農，務茲稼穡。zhi4 ben3 yu2 nong2, wu4 zi1 jia4 se4
Government is based on farming; mind the yearly sowing, reaping!

俶載南畝，我藝黍稷。chu4 zai3 nan2 mu3, wo3 yi4 shu3 ji4
I start the year down in the southern field; there I cultivate the season's yield.

稅熟貢新，勸賞黜陟。shui4 shou2 gong4 xin1, quan4 shang3 chu4 zhi4
For tax they bring the fresh and new; reward or punishment is due.

孟軻敦素，史魚秉直。meng4 ke1 dun1 su4, shi3 yu2 bing3 zhi2
Meng Ke was honest, deep and pure; Shi Yu always true and sure.

庶幾中庸，勞謙謹敕。shu4 ji1 zhong1 yong1, lao2 qian1 jin3 chi4
Approach the Moderated Mean; strive to be modest, on guard to be clean!

聆音察理，鑒貌辨色。ling2 yin1 cha2 li3, jian4 mao4 bian4 se4
Examine the tone and reasoning too; consider the face, how it changes hue.

貽厥嘉猷，勉其祗植。yi2 jue2 jia1 you2, mian3 qi2 zhi1 zhi2
Pass down to others your fine principle; encourage them to carefully stand tall.

省躬譏誡，寵增抗極。xing3 gong1 ji1 jie4, chong3 zeng1 kang4 ji2
When stung by words, search soul for reason; don't be flattered into treason.

殆辱近恥，林皋幸即。dai4 ru3 jin4 chi3, lin2 gao1 xing4 ji2
Lurking scandal, looming shame; in joy move up to wood and stream.

兩疏見機，解組誰逼。liang3 shu1 jian4 ji1, jie(3) zu3 shei2 bi1
The brothers Shu saw trouble stem; turned in seals, who forced them?

索居閒處，沉默寂寥。suo3 ju1 xian2 chu3, chen2 mo4 ji4 liao2
Alone reside in tranquil spot; speaking little, moving not.

求古尋論，散慮逍遙。qiu2 gu3 xun2 lun4, san4 lv4 xiao1 yao3
Ponder past words, research and write; dispel your cares, live in delight.

欣奏累遣，感謝歡招。xin1 zou4 lei4 qian3, qi1 xie4 huan1 zhao1
Delights all gathered, drudge dispersed; worries gone, in joy immersed.

渠荷的歷，園莽抽條。qu2 he2 di2 li4, yuan2 mang3 chou1 tiao2
The beauty of the lotus pond; the garden plants, each stem and frond.

枇杷晚翠，梧桐蚤凋。pi2 pa2 wan3 cui4, wu2 tong2 zao3 diao1
Loquat late in year still green, Firmiana fast to fall.

陳根委翳，落葉飄搖。chen2 gen1 wei3 yi4, luo4 ye4 piao1 yao2
Old trees bare or dead on ground; fallen leaves fly all around.

游鶡獨運，凌摩絳霄。you2 kun1 du2 yun4, ling2 mo2 jiang4 xiao1
The roc flies off alone and high; skirts the red cloud in the sky.

Chapter 6

耽讀玩市，寓目囊箱。dan1 du2 wan2 shi4, yu4 mu4 nang2 xiang1
Dizzy reading, lost in stacks; eyes on bookbags, shelves and racks.

易輟攸畏，屬耳垣牆。yi4 you2 you1 wei4, shu(3) er3 yuan2 qiang2
Laxness is a thing to fear; the office wall affixed with ear.

具膳餐飯，適口充腸。ju4 shan4 can1 fan4, shi4 kou3 chong1 chang2
Prepare the meals, eat enough; the mouth to suit, the gut to stuff.

飽飫烹宰，飢厭糟糠。bao3 yu4 peng1 zai4, ji1 yan4 zao1 kang1
Gluttons gorged on boiled game; the hungry glad with coarsest grain.

親戚故舊，老少異糧。qin1 qi1 gu3 jiu4, lao3 shao4 yi4 liang2
With family and old friends there; old and young, different fare.

妾御績紡，待巾帷房。qie4 yu4 ji1 fang3, shi4 jin1 wei2 fang2

Junior wife, spinning thread; combs and towels, making bed.

紈扇圓潔，銀燭燁煌。wan2 shan4 yuan2 xie2, yin2 zhu2 wei3 huang2
Silken fan like moon so bright; silver candleholders' light.

晝眠夕寐，藍筍象床。zhou4 mian2 xi1 mei4, lan2 sun3 xiang4 chuang2
Snooze at noontime, sleep at night; bamboo on ivory bed is right.

弦歌酒宴，接杯舉觴。xian2 ge1 jiu3 yan4, jie1 bei1 ju3 shang1
Music, song, and tippling party, lift the winecups, drink up hearty!

矯手頓足，悅豫且康。jiao(3) shou3 dun4 zu2, yue4 yu4 qie3 kang1
Lift your hands and stomp your feet, happy, healthy, with the beat!

嫡後嗣續，祭祀烝嘗。di2 hou4 si4 xu4, ji4 si4 zheng1 chang2
Main queen's sons continuing; winter, autumn worshipping

稽顙再拜，悚懼恐惶。ji1 sang3 zai4 bai4, song3 ju4 kong3 huang2
Kneel and knock, again ground head; sincere respect, in grief and dread.

箋牒簡要，顧答審詳。jian1 die2 jian3 yao4, gu4 da2 shen3 xiang2
Your notes and letters brief, concise; replies detailed, thorough, wise.

骸垢想浴，執熱願涼。hai2 gou4 xiang3 yu4, zhi2 re4 yuan4 liang2
Bones dirty, long for bathing pool; too hot to handle, wish for cool.

驢騾犢特，駭躍超驤。lv2 luo2 du2 te4, hai4 yue4 chao1 xiang1
Donkey, mule, calf and bull; leaping, rearing, panic full.

誅斬賊盜，捕獲叛亡。zhu1 zhan3 zei2 dao4, bu3 huo4 pan4 wang2
Kill thieves and bandits, every one; arrest and try those on the run.

Chapter 7

布射僚丸，嵇琴阮嘯。bu4 she4 liao2 wan2, ji1 qin2 ruan3 xiao4
Lv Bu's bow, Yi Liao's balls; Ji Kang's zither, Ruan Ji's calls.

恬筆倫紙，鈞巧任鈞。tian2 bi3 lun2 zhi3, jun1 qiao3 ren4 diao4
Tian gave us brush, Lun, paper fine; Jun compass, wheels, Ren, hook and line.

釋紛利俗，竝皆佳妙。shi4 fen1 li4 su2, bing4 jie1 jia1 miao4
Peace and benefit to us; together all are marvelous.

毛施淑姿，工顰妍笑。mao2 shi1 shu2 zi1, gong1 pin2 yan2 xiao4
Mao and Shi, most beautiful; brows knit in pain, smile charming still.

年矢每催，曦暉朗曜。nian2 shi3 mei2 cui1, xi1 hui1 lang2 yao4
The clock of years times out all lives; the blazing sun alone survives.

璿璣懸幹，晦魄環照。xuan2 ji1 xuan2 wo4, hui4 po4 huan2 zhao4
The Dipper turns suspended in the night; world bathed by last moon's pale and gloomy light.

指薪修祜，永綏吉劭。zhi3 xin1 xiu1 hu4, yong3 sui1 ji2 shao4
Ideas to tinder, leave them blessed; always encourage, guide, suggest.

矩步引領，俯仰廊廟。ju4 bu4 yin3 ling3, fu(3) yang3 lang2 miao4
Measured steps, neck thrust forward; all the bowing, life at court.

束帶矜庄，徘徊瞻眺。shu4 dai4 jin1 zhuang4, pai2 huai2 zhan1 tiao4
Robes wrapped with sash, severe and grand; calmly pace, behold your land.

孤陋寡聞，愚蒙等誚。gu1 lou4 gua3 wen2, yu3 meng2 deng3 qiao4
Fools and ignoramuses; dimwits too, ridiculous.

謂語助者，焉哉乎也。wei4 yu3 zhu4 zhe, yan1 zai1 hu1 ye3
So-called helpers; yan zai hu ye.