

## THE CANON OF YAO

### Shu Jing 書經

This reading from the **Shu Jing** (Shu Ching) is taken from the translation of James Legge (reprinted by Hong Kong University Press, 1960, vol. III, page 15).

---

1 <sup>1</sup>Examining into antiquity, we find that the emperor Yao was called Fang Xun. <sup>2</sup>He was reverential, intelligent, accomplished, and thoughtful, naturally and without effort. <sup>3</sup>He was sincerely courteous and capable of all complaisance. <sup>4</sup>The display of these qualities reached to the four extremities of the empire and extended from earth to heaven. (2) <sup>1</sup>He was able to make the able and virtuous distinguished, and thence proceeded to the love of the nine classes of his kindred, who all became harmonious. <sup>2</sup>He also regulated and polished the people of his domain, who all became brightly intelligent. <sup>3</sup>Finally, he united and harmonized the myriad states of the empire, and lo! the black-haired people were transformed. <sup>4</sup>The result was universal concord.

3 <sup>1</sup>Thereupon Yao commanded Xi and He, in reverent accordance with their observation of the wide heavens, to calculate and delineate the movements and appearances of the sun, the moon, the stars, and the zodiacal spaces, and so to deliver respectfully the seasons to the people.

4 <sup>1</sup>He separately commanded the second brother Xi to reside at Yu, in what was called the Bright Valley, and there respectfully to receive as a guest the rising sun, and to adjust and arrange the labors of the spring. <sup>2</sup>"The day," he said, "is of the medium length and the star is in Niao; you may thus exactly determine mid-spring. <sup>3</sup>The people begin to disperse, and birds and beasts breed and copulate.

5 <sup>1</sup>He further commanded the third brother Xi to reside at Nan Jiao, and arrange the transformations of the summer, and respectfully to observe the extreme limit of

the shadow. <sup>2</sup>"The day," said he, "is at its longest, and the star is in Huo. <sup>3</sup>You may thus exactly determine mid-summer. <sup>4</sup>The people are more dispersed, and birds and beasts have their feathers and hair thin and change their coats."

6 <sup>1</sup>He separately commanded the second brother He to reside at the west, in what was called the Dark Valley, and there respectfully to convoy the setting sun, and to adjust and arrange the completing labors of the autumn. <sup>2</sup>"The night," he said, "is of the medium length, and the star is Xu; you may thus exactly determine mid-autumn. <sup>3</sup>The people begin to feel at ease, and birds and beasts have their coats in good condition."

7 <sup>1</sup>He further commanded the third brother He to reside in the northern region, in what was called the Sombre Capital, and there to adjust and examine the changes of the winter. <sup>2</sup>"The day," said he, "is at its shortest, and the star is Mao. <sup>3</sup>You may thus exactly determine mid-winter. <sup>4</sup>The people keep their cozy corners, and the coats of birds and beasts are downy and thick."

8 <sup>1</sup>The emperor said, "Ah! you, Xi and He, a round year consists of three hundred, sixty, and six days. <sup>2</sup>By means of an intercalary month do you fix the four seasons, and complete the determination of the year. <sup>3</sup>Thereafter, in exact accordance with this, regulating the various officers, all the works of the year will be fully performed.

9 <sup>1</sup>The emperor said, "Who will search out for me a man according to the times, whom I may raise and employ?" <sup>2</sup>Fang Qi said, "There is your heir-son Zhu, who is highly intelligent." <sup>3</sup>The emperor said,

## THE CANON OF YAO

"Alas! he is insincere and quarrelsome. <sup>4</sup>Can he do?"

10 <sup>1</sup>The emperor said, "Who will search out for me a man equal to the exigency of my affairs?" <sup>2</sup>Huan Dou said, "Oh! there is the minister of Works, whose merits have just been displayed in various ways." <sup>3</sup>The emperor said, "Alas! when unemployed, he can talk, but when employed, his actions turn out differently. <sup>4</sup>He is respectful only in appearance. <sup>5</sup>See! the floods assail the heavens!"

11 <sup>1</sup>The emperor said, "Oh! chief of the four mountains, destructive in their overflow are the waters of the inundation. <sup>2</sup>In their vast extent they embrace the mountains and overtop the hills, threatening the heavens with their floods, so that the inferior people groan and murmur. <sup>3</sup>Is there a capable man to whom I can assign the correction of this calamity?" <sup>4</sup>All in the court said, "Oh! there is Gun." <sup>5</sup>The emperor said, "Alas! no, by no means! <sup>6</sup>He is disobedient to orders and tries to injure his peers." <sup>7</sup>His Eminence said, "Well, but try him, and then you can have done with him." <sup>8</sup>The emperor said to Gun, "Go, and be reverent!" <sup>9</sup>For nine years he labored, but the work was unaccomplished.

12 <sup>1</sup>The emperor said, "Oh! you chief of the four mountains, I have been on the throne for seventy years. <sup>2</sup>You can carry out my appointments; I will resign my throne to you." <sup>3</sup>His Eminence said, "I have not the virtue; I should only disgrace the imperial seat." <sup>4</sup>The emperor said, "Point out some one among the illustrious, or set forth one from among the poor and mean." <sup>5</sup>All in the court said to the emperor, "There is an unmarried man among the lower people called Shun of Yu." <sup>6</sup>The emperor said, "Yes, I have heard of him. <sup>7</sup>What is his character?" <sup>8</sup>His Eminence said, "He is the son of a blind man. <sup>9</sup>His father was obstinately unprincipled; his step-mother was insincere; his half brother Xiang was arrogant. <sup>10</sup>He has been able, however, by his filial piety to live in harmony with them, and to lead them gradually to self-government, so that they no longer proceed to great wickedness." <sup>11</sup>The emperor said, "I will try him! <sup>12</sup>I will wive him, and then see his behavior with my two daughters." <sup>13</sup>On this he gave orders, and sent down his two daughters to the north of the Gui, to be wives in the family of Yu. <sup>14</sup>The emperor said to them, "Be reverent!"

Source: James Legge translation, Saint Anselm College,  
<http://www.chinapage.com/confucius/shujing-e.html#YAO>  
[Last accessed: 28 October 2011]