



## LÜ Benzhong's *A Book for Teaching Children* Established the System of the Four Books

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### Abstract

In LÜ Benzhong's *A Book for Teaching Children*, he had already regarded the "Four Books" which include *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *The Mencius* as a complete system and the teaching material for children. This was before Zhu Xi's *Collected Comments on the Four Confucian Books*. Obviously, Zhu Xi was familiar with LÜ Benzhong's book, *A Book for Teaching Children*, and his edit of the Four Books was influenced by *A Book for Teaching Children*. Although Cheng Yi et al had vigorously promoted *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*, it was LÜ Benzhong's *A Book for Teaching Children* that first regarded the Four Books as an independent and comprehensive system and applied them to teaching practice. Therefore, LÜ Benzhong basically finalized the system of the Four Books.

**Key words:** LÜ Benzhong; *A Book for Teaching Children*; Finalize; System of the Four Books

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### INTRODUCTION

With further research, especially through the studying about "the Four Books research", some researchers put forward some new views on the formation of the Four

Books from the two dimensions of the neo-Confucianism development and constituting the Four Books, such as Shu Jingnan (2007) divided the development of the Four Books research in the Song Dynasty into five stages: the beginning of the Four Books research, the transformation of the studying Confucian classics in the early Song Dynasty and the rise of the classic annotating about the Four Books, the Four Books research becoming the official research, preliminary formation of the Four Books research of the neo-Confucianism, accomplishing great achievements in the Four Books research. In the Shu Jingnan's paper, he puts Wang Anshi, Zhang Zai, Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi et al into the movement of the Four Books research, respectively gives names such as "Wang Anshi's Four Books research", "two Cheng's Four Books research", "Zhu Xi's Four Books research" and so on, and builds a "Four Books research system". It is important to note that he regards "Zhu Xi's Four Books research" as the final stage of the Four Books research. This is not correct. After the Zhu Xi's book, the Four Books category of classics section of *The General Catalogue of Four Class Books* at least collects 10 different editions of the Four Books. So the edition of Four Books edited by Zhu Xi is not in the final stage of the Four Books research. Obviously, Shu Jingnan's object of study is not "the Four Books research", but is the formation process of the Four Books system and also only so, he is likely to regard Zhu Xi as the finisher of the Four Books system in the Song Dynasty. Shu believes that Wang Anshi put "Etiquette and Ceremonial" into desuetude, and listed *The Book of Rites* which includes *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* as classics and the imperial examination subject meant that Wang Anshi promoted the Four Books research to the official research" (Shu & Wang, 2007). Shu also argues that "another famous neo-Confucianist Zhang Zai more systematically studied the Four Books" (Shu & Wang, 2007), and cites a Zhang Zai saying to highlight

equal positions of *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *The Mencius*:

Scholars believe and have faith in books. They should believe and have faith in *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Mencius*..... such as *The Great Learning*, and *The Doctrine of the Mean* which were written by a sage and no doubt (Shu & Wang, 2007).

However, the full text of the citation is: "Scholars believe and have faith in books. They should believe and have faith in *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Mencius*, *Classic of Poetry*, and *The Books*. These books written by some scholars show various right principles, although miscellaneous, no harmless, such as *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean* which were written by a sage and no doubt" (Zhang, 1978, p.277). The citation is not long, but he adds ellipsis. What is the purpose? In fact, this text uses analogy method, intends to persuade people believe in *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Mencius*, *Classic of Poetry*, *The Books*, *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*. These materials can only prove the Neo-Confucianism development promoting the formation of the Four Books, does not prove that the completion of independent Four Books system.

The judgment of the Neo-Confucianism development promoting the formation of the Four Books system or the Four Books system indicating the development of the Neo-Confucianism is indisputable, but the Shu's paper is fuzzy at explaining the formation of the Four Books system. From the above material, can't find Wang Anshi, Zhang Zai regarded *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *The Mencius* as a complete and independent system. In terms of the formation of the Four Books system, we find that Lǚ Benzhong's *A Book for Teaching Children* regarded the Four Books as a complete system and used them as the teaching material for children before Zhu Xi's *Collected Comments on the Four Confucian Books*. So we can say that it was Lǚ Benzhong who completed the basic formation of the Four Books system.

## 1. FORMATION OF THE FOUR BOOKS

If it cannot become a system, also can not be independent; similarly, if it can not become independent, also can not become a system. In the imperial examinations of the Yuan Dynasty, the Four Books were once used as independent classics. *The History of the Ming Dynasty: Art and Literature* sets a category of the Four Books up. *The General Catalogue of Four Class Books* follows the old system, and also sets a category of the Four Books up in the classics. It means that they had the recognition and acceptance of the Four Books as a whole independent system and the reality of the system's self-development. The recognition and acceptance were because the Four Books have the characteristics which are different from other books and self-contained. Of course, not because

*The History of the Ming Dynasty: Art and Literature* and *The General Catalogue of Four Class Books* set a category of the Four Books up in the classics, the Four Books can be a independent system, but because the Four Books have the reality of becoming a category so They set a category of the Four Books up.

*The Analects of Confucius*, *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *The Mencius* were compiled into a set, was the premise of the Four Books becoming independent. Of course, *The General Catalogue of Four Class Books* also includes many single editions in the category of the Four Books and there are 10 books which are listed before Zhu Xi's *Collected Comments on the Four Confucian Books* in the category of the Four Books, on the one hand, it was because "in accordance with rules created earlier and the old rules being legal" ("A brief introduction of the Four Books category"); on the other hand, because "after Zhao Qi, He Yan, ancient books of preservation are not much; after the Annotation of *The Analects of Confucius* written in the times of the Emperor Wu of the Liang country, ancient books lost the most", so "no longer checking authors' names". Some books are listed after the Zhu Xi's book in *The General Catalogue of Four Class Books*, such as "some books which had been influenced by the Zhu Xi's book explained the Four Books since the Yuan Dynasty or the Ming Dynasty." Some books which appeared in the Zhu Xi's time or a little bit later listed after the Zhu Xi's book in *The General Catalogue of Four Class Books* were due to the influence by the Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism. These books have been listed in the category of the Four Books only because "the Zhu Xi's book has appeared for five hundred years" ("A brief introduction of the Four Books category"). Therefore, the Four Books become an independent category of classics, mainly because Zhu Xi established a complete system which included *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *The Mencius* as components and the system carried the thoughts of the Neo-Confucianism. As the carriers, *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *The Mencius* must constitute a complete and independent system of classics.

For that matter, Ian Mu thinks "the Four Books were compiled by Cheng and Zhu" (Qian, 2002, 180). Surely, Zhu Xi's *Collected Comments on the Four Confucian Books* can prove it; however, we have not seen a set of the Four Books compiled by the Cheng brothers. It is ok to explain the Cheng brothers' "compile" as the "establish" of the Neo-Confucianism. If we explain the Cheng brothers' "compile" as the "formation" of a complete and independent system of classics including *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *The Mencius*. It is questionable. The History of the Song Dynasty Taoism writes that the Cheng brothers "honored *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*, just like their honoring *The Analects of Confucius*

and *The Mencius*.” Does this let Qian Mu think “the Four Books were compiled by Cheng and Zhu”?

The Cheng brothers’ biggest contribution to the formation of the Four Books just is that they “honored *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*”:

“*The Great Learning* was written by Confucius. It is better to start learning from the book.” (“Two Chengs’ Last Works”, 1981, p.411).

“Yinzi said that Cheng Yi once said that *The Doctrine of the Mean* was the Confucian classic (“Ercheng Waishu”, 1981, p.411)”.

But:

When Di first met teacher Cheng Yi, he asked what he should learn when he just started learning. Teacher Cheng Yi said: “For entering the door of the morals, no better book than *The Great Learning*. Now scholars need to have such a book, others such as *The Analects of Confucius* and *The Mencius* (“Two Chengs’ Last Works”, 1981, p.277).

Here, Cheng Yi particularly honored *The Great Learning*, and listed *The Great Learning*, *The Analects of Confucius* and *The Mencius* as the books “For entering the door of the morals”. It was very close to the system of the Four Books, but only had the three books. In addition, we can not find two Chengs got an idea beyond the scale of the three books.

The Cheng brothers honored *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*, just like their honoring *The Analects of Confucius* and *The Mencius*. It only means that the society would pay attention to *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* like *The Analects of Confucius* and *The Mencius* because the Cheng brothers honored *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*. It does not mean that the Cheng brothers mentioned the two books with *The Analects of Confucius* and *The Mencius* together.

We neither see the Cheng brothers formed a set of the Four Books nor see they mentioned the two books with *The Analects of Confucius* and *The Mencius* together and give a systematic explanation. On this basis, we say that two Chengs did not finalize a completed and independent system of the Four Books.

## 2. A BOOK FOR TEACHING CHILDREN REGARDED THE FOUR BOOKS AS A WHOLE

In fact, in the development process of the Four Books research of from two Chengs to Zhu Xi, it was LÜ Benzhong really proposed to put *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Analects of Confucius* and *The Mencius* together as a complete and independent system. He took two steps toward completing the Four Books system in his *A Book for Teaching Children*.

## 2.1 Root of Knowledge: The Four Books Emerged as a Complete System

Studying should be based on *The Book of Filial Piety*, *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Great Learning* and *The Mencius* and detailed study them. Then generally study *Classic of Poetry*, *The Books*, *The Book of Changes*, *The Spring and Autumn Annals*. There must be some harvest. Since you have your own thoughts, you can use the strengths of other schools. (Lü, 1987, p.516).

Although LÜ Benzhong mentioned *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Great Learning*, *The Mencius* with *The Book of Filial Piety* here but they can be separated into two parts because of the nature of *A Book for Teaching Children*. *A Book for Teaching Children* was used by the Lu family school which must first focus on the ethical and moral education of the children. The Book of Filial Piety just conformed to the requirements of the feudal society’s ethics. The Book of Filial Piety is brought to the attention especially since the Han dynasty. After the imperial examination beginning, people paid more attention to The Book of Filial Piety, not only the schools taught The Book of Filial Piety, but also set the relevant subjects up in the imperial examinations. In the Song Dynasty, emperor Song Zhenzong said, “if you want to become a educated person, you had better study The Book of Filial Piety” (*The History of the Song Dynasty*, Vol.266). In Addition, Lu family was a senior family and the family paid attention to practical knowledge (*The General Catalogue of Four Class Books*, Zi Section, Confucian Category, Abstract of *A Book for Teaching Children*). Because LÜ Benzhong put The Book of Filial Piety in front of *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Great Learning* and *The Mencius*, you can find he paid attention to The Book of Filial Piety as well. So in order to educate children, *A Book for Teaching Children* was to emphasis on The Book of Filial Piety.

LÜ Benzhong discussed the root of knowledge in his teaching process and he initially separated *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Great Learning* and *The Mencius* from other classics. This separation was firstly embodied in that *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Great Learning* and *The Mencius* as a whole had a special role and status in the whole knowledge system and they were “the root of knowledge”, and the foundations of “There must be some harvest” and “Since you have your own thoughts, you can use the strengths of other schools.” Next, in the learning phases, *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Great Learning* and *The Mencius* were in the first phase of the learning, and *Classic of Poetry*, *The Books*, *The Book of Changes*, *The Spring and Autumn Annals* were in the second phase of the learning. At

the same time, the learning way of each phase was also different, from “detailed study them” to “Then generally study”. The children’s learning, of course, was to start from the first phase and establish the root of knowledge. Thus it is safe to say, the latest the Lu family school put *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Great Learning* and *The Mencius* together and use them as a complete system of textbooks to teach the children was in the Lǚ Benzhong’s time.

## 2.2 Deep and Manifest: Finalizing the System of the Four Books

Before Confucius was born, heretical beliefs had not risen. Although the countries had ups and downs, there is no other argument in the education, so the Classic of Poetry, The Books only generally explain how to solve the social problems. After Confucius was born, heresy rose, so the sages’ teaching were deep and manifest, such as *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*. Later *The Mencius* was also innovation and promoting. (Lǚ, 1987, p.516).

In this explanation, *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *The Mencius* were no longer tied with The Book of Filial Piety, but were “deep and manifest” and were fully independent relying on these common characteristics. Although *The Mencius* was mentioned after *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Mencius* could also innovate and promote this kind of “deep and manifest” thoughts of Confucius. On the one hand, it showed that *The Mencius* also had the “deep and manifest” characteristics; on the other hand, also suggested that *The Mencius* and the former three books could form a system together.

At this point, *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *The Mencius* first appeared as a complete and independent system. Meanwhile Lǚ Benzhong was influenced by the two Cheng’s neo-Confucianism, and then put forward the structure of the system in the *A Book for Teaching Children*.

Lu family had a close tie to the Cheng brothers, and had sufficient opportunity to accept the Cheng brothers’ influence. The *A Book for Teaching Children* said that Lǚ Benzhong great-grandfather Lu Gongzhu recommended Cheng Hao for an official position and Lǚ Benzhong grandfather Lu Xizhe regarded Cheng Yi as a teacher:

The older brother was Cheng Hao who was a successful candidate in the highest imperial examinations and became an official because of the examinations. Lu Gongzhu was a high rank official and recommended Cheng Hao for a high rank official position. (Lǚ, 1987, p.516).

When Lu Xizhe was twenty-one years old, Lu Gongzhu let him go to the Imperial College. He sat beside Mr. Hu. Cheng Yi was in a class which was close to Lu Xizhe’s and was only a few years older than Lu Xizhe. Lu Xizhe was surprised by Cheng Yi’s thoughts, and then first regarded Cheng Yi as a teacher. (Lǚ, 1987, p.517)

When Cheng Yi was a student, Lu Xizhe first regarded Cheng Yi as a teacher. It showed that Lu Xizhe respected Cheng Yi’s theory.

In addition, Lu family teaching was also significantly affected by two Chengs. The Song and Yuan Dynasty Study Cases · Xingyang Study Cases evaluates Lu Xizhe academic achievements and says he “follows two Chengs”:

When Lu Xizhe was young, he did not have a teacher. He first learned from Jiao Qianzhi, a student of the Lu Ling school. Soon, he followed Anding, then Taishan, kangjie, also Wang Anshi, and he finally learned from Cheng Yi. He accumulated his knowledge widely. (Huang, 1992, p.144).

Crucially, Lǚ Benzhong’s explanation on the Four Books system had many similarities with two Chengs’ saying of advocating the Four Books. Lǚ Benzhong taught children to understand “the root of knowledge”, that was similar with Cheng Yi’s “entering the door of the morals.” Lǚ Benzhong thought the Four Books were “Deep and manifest”, that was similar with Cheng Yi’s particularly honoring *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*. In Zhu Xi’s *Collected Comments on the Four Confucian Books*, Zhu Xi highlighted these similarities and put these two Chengs’ views in every note which appeared after the corresponding article title. In the process of the formation of the Four Books, it can also be considered that Lǚ Benzhong benefited from his grandfather Lu Xizhe “accumulated his knowledge widely” and finalized the system of the Four Books. Accordingly, we can conclude that the basic structure of the Four Books was born in the teaching of the Lu family, roughly between Lu Xizhe and Lǚ Benzhong, and the system eventually embodied in Lǚ Benzhong’s *A Book for Teaching Children*.

## 3. Lǚ BENZHONG’S EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE EARLIER THAN ZHU XI

As we know, Lǚ Benzhong died in 1145 AD, and Zhu Xi was born in 1130 AD. Lǚ Benzhong died when Zhu Xi was just 15 years old. Zhu Xi’s *Collected Comments on the Four Confucian Books* appeared in 1182 AD. Apparently, the *A Book for Teaching Children* appeared earlier than Zhu Xi’s *Collected Comments on the Four Confucian Books*, so Lǚ Benzhong finalized the system of the Four Books earlier than Zhu Xi. Was Zhu Xi compiling the Four Books affected by Lǚ Benzhong?

Zhu Xi knew Lǚ Benzhong’s great-grandson Lu Zuqian very well. When Lu Zuqian died in 1181 AD, Zhu Xi was in great grief to write down The Article Mourns Lu Bogong (Zuqian) Works. In The History of Song Dynasty, the Lu Zuqian’s biography says, “ZuQian learned from his family which has the literature of the central plains.” The literature of the central plains was moved to the south by Lǚ Benzhong (Lu, 1985, p.221).

Lu Zuqian must also learn from the knowledge inherited or taught by Lǚ Benzhong. Therefore, Zhu Xi was able to learn the essence of Lu family teaching, because Zhu Xi was a good friend of Lu Zuqian.

Moreover, Zhu Xi was also very familiar with *A Book for Teaching Children*, and he more than once talked about *A Book for Teaching Children*:

“Such as Lu’s *A Book for Teaching Children* recorded that Zhou Dunyi wrote Tong Shu and said that the author had a deep intention” (Zhu, 2010, p.1306). “Your grandfather wrote *A Book for Teaching Children* which very recommends Su and Huang methods of writing poems and articles” (Zhu, 2010, p.1429). “In the second volume of *A Book for Teaching Children*, there are several good ways to prevent idle. These ways should be admired” (Zhu, 2010, p.1784). “In the second volume of *A Book for Teaching Children*, there are the methods for the government management. These methods are also quite bright” (Zhu, 2010, p.2064).

Zhu Xi’s above comments came from his discussion about *A Book for Teaching Children*. Zhu Xi had these discussions when he talked with Wang Yingchen, Lu Zuqian, Fan Bochong, and Ouyang Qingsi. It shows Zhu Xi was very familiar with *A Book for Teaching Children* and was able to cite the contents. If consider the finishing time of Zhu Xi’s *Collected Comments on the Four Confucian Books*, and the time period of Zhu Xi associating with Lu Zuqian, can conclude that Zhu Xi must see *A Book for Teaching Children* before he finished his book. So Zhu Xi should know Lǚ Benzhong’s discussion about the Four Books.

Zhu Xi had different academic views from Lu Zuqian’s but mainly was not on Confucian classics. In general, Lu Zuqian could follow two Chengs’ thoughts about Confucian classics. Zhu Xi was really not satisfied with Lu Zuqian’s attention to the history books:

Bogong (Lu Zuqian) liked to advise people to read “Zuo Zhuan”, Sima Qian’s Historical Records. It lets his son et al promote Sima Qian to Confucius level! (*Zhu Zhi Yulei*, Vol.122, p.3853).

Because the teaching of Lu family included many kinds of knowledge and was practical, it paid more attention to the history. It made Zhu Xi who defended Taoism and Confucius very uncomfortable, “promote Sima Qian to Confucius level!” But Zhu Xi had still accepted the effect of *A Book for Teaching Children*. It was *A Book for Teaching Children* which Zhu Xi was familiar with put forward the complete and independent system of the Four Books before Zhu Xi’s *Collected Comments on the Four Confucian Books*.

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## CONCLUSION

To sum up, under the background of neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty, Lǚ Benzhong inherited two Chengs

proposals that highlighted the foundation positions of *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *The Mencius* in the education and academics, and formed a complete and independent system of the Four Books. If refer to Wang Anshi, Zhang Zai, two Chengs’ proposals before Lǚ Benzhong and Zhu Xi’s after Lǚ Benzhong, we can conclude that it was Lǚ Benzhong who first put forward a complete and independent system of the Four Books. After Lǚ Benzhong, Zhu Xi developed the system, confirmed the order of *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Analects of Confucius* and *The Mencius* and further put forward the reading order of the Four Books. In the development of the system, Lǚ Benzhong’s contribution was that he basically finalized the design of the system.

*A Book for Teaching Children* was a book for children so it is often ignored by people probably, but it really has the important value in the studying about the Four Books.

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