

# A Study of Chen Chun's Thoughts on Children's Education

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## Abstract

Chen Chun attaches great importance to children's education, upholds the educational thought by focusing on ideals and beliefs, and inherits and develops Zhu Xi's children's education thought with educational practice. This kind of educational thought still has important enlightenment and reference significance today, and it is worth digging and inheriting in depth. This paper uses the method of literature research to sort out Chen Chun's literatures on education. On this basis, it combs and summarizes Chen Chun's educational thoughts on children's education from three dimensions: the function of children's education, the content of children's education and the means of children's education. Hoping this article can provide some references for the research of educational thoughts of Chen Chun and Neo-Confucianism scholars in the Song Dynasty.

## Keywords

Chen Chun, Children's Education, Thoughts

## 1. Introduction

Chen Chun, a famous Neo-Confucian in the Southern Song Dynasty, is one of Zhu Xi's famous disciples. He devoted all his life to the elucidation and dissemination of Zhu Xi's Neo Confucianism. He made great contribution to promoting Zhu Xi's thoughts. The Qing people evaluated Chen Chun as "the one who sticks to his teacher and does not lose his dimension" in *Siku Quanshu* (Yong & Ji, 1986). Chen Chun, who lived in Longxi town of Zhangzhou, Fujian Province, did not serve as an official in his whole life. In the process of teaching and training children, he wrote a lot of educational works. In the process of educational practice, Chen Chun followed the law of children's growth, attached importance to moral education, compiled matching textbooks, and innovated the form of

textbooks.

The study of Chen Chun mainly focuses on his thought, his inheritance of Zhu Xi's thought and his influence in academia (Zeng, 2018; Guo, 2018; Zhong, 2012). Among them, the study of Chen Chun's thought is the most in-depth, involves philosophy, Neo-Confucianism, Confucianism and education (Zhu, 2004; Li, 2018; Zhang, 2012; Zheng, 2018; Lu, 2014). In the study of Chen Chun's educational thought, Zhu Changrong and others started from the perspective of Chen Chun educates his descendants to abide by moral etiquette and learn to be filial to their parents and respect their elders (Zhu, 2017). Chen Lin outlines Chen Chun's thoughts on children's education from four aspects: the significance, purpose, content and method (Chen, 2016). Although the above two articles already have some research on Chen Chun's educational thoughts, they are descriptive, lack of systematic collation and interpretation of Chen Chun's literature on educational thoughts, and lack of systematic and in-depth summary of Chen Chun's educational thoughts.

Chen Chun attaches great importance to children's education, upholds the educational thought by focusing on ideals and beliefs. This kind of educational thought still has important enlightenment and reference significance today, and it is worth digging and inheriting in depth.

This educational thought still has important inspiration and reference significance today, and is worthy of further excavation and inheritance.

## 2. Chen Chun's Main Literature on Children's Education

The existing literature on Chen Chun's children's education are mainly include *Beixi Ziyi*, *Xiaoxue Shili*, *Shu Shi Xue Zi*, *Shu Yue Yu Zhai Sheng*, *Qimeng Chusong*, *Xun Er Tong Ba Shou*, *Shi Er Ding Sun Er Jue*, and so on. Among them, the first four are textbooks for children compiled by Chen Chun, which embodied Chen Chun's thoughts of children's education. The latter three are poems and book written by Chen Chun for educating his own children. This paper intends to interpret the seven literatures mentioned above and explore Chen Chun's thoughts of children's education from them.

*Beixi Ziyi* is Chen Chun's lecture in Beixi town in his later years (Figure 1). It systematically interprets and explains the important categories involved in Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism.

*Xiaoxue Shili* is included in *Five Legacy Norms* written by Chen Hongmou in the Qing Dynasty (Figure 2). It is a group of poems written by Chen Chun for his students to guide them to learn etiquette. It consists of fourteen ancient poems about serving relatives, ten ancient poems about serving elders, eleven ancient poems about men and women, and eight ancient poems about other etiquettes.

*Shu Shi Xue Zi* is included in Volume 16 of Chen Chun's *Complete Works of Beixi* (Figure 3). It is a study material of four-character rhymes written by Chen Chun for his students.



Figure 1. *Beixi Ziyi*.

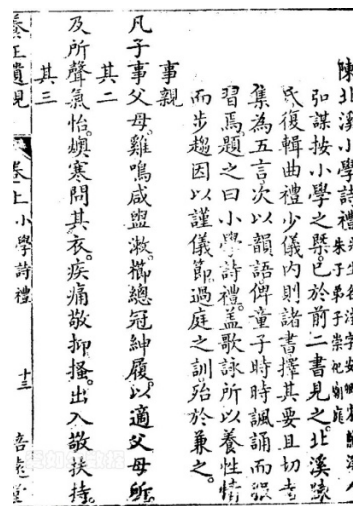


Figure 2. *Xiaoxue Shili*.

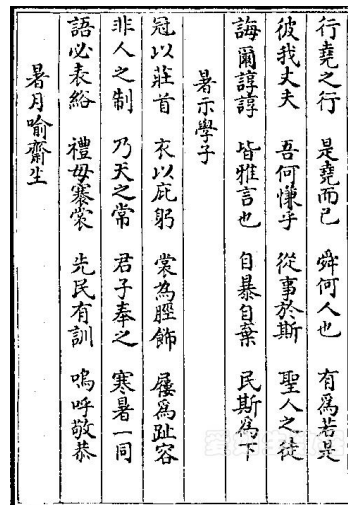


Figure 3. *Shu Shi Xue Zi*.

*Shu Yue Yu Zhai Sheng* is included in Volume 16 of Chen Chun's *Complete Works of Beixi* (Figure 4). It is an article written by Chen Chun for his students to guide them to learn daily etiquette.

*Qimeng Chusong* is included in Volume 16 of Chen Chun's *Complete Works of Beixi* (Figure 5), it is an enlightenment book compiled by Chen Chun for his three-year-old child. The whole book is composed of three parts: the preface, *Qimeng Chusong* and *Xunmeng Yayan*. The preface explains the author's creative reasons and his views on children's education. *Qimeng Chusong* is three-character rhyme, totaling 19 chapters, 228 words. *Xunmeng Yayan* is four-character rhyme, totaling 78 chapters, 1278 words.

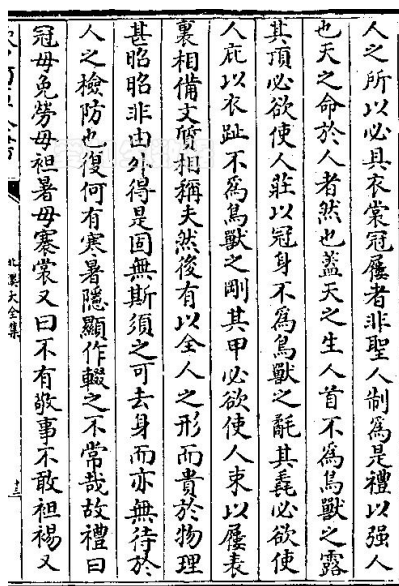


Figure 4. *Shu Yue Yu Zhai Sheng*.

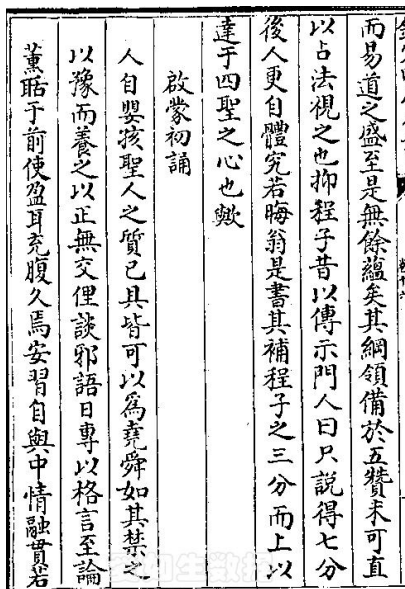


Figure 5. *Qimeng Chusong*.

*Xun Er Tong Ba Shou* is included in Volume 3 of Chen Chun's *Complete Works of Beixi* (Figure 6). It is eight five-character poems. These eight poems are written by Chen Chun to educate his children and students. The first four poems require students to learn the words and deeds of Confucius and his disciples, and the latter four poems guide students in their specific practices in life.

*Shi Er Ding Sun Er Jue* is included in Volume 3 of Chen Chun's *Complete Works of Beixi* (Figure 7). It is composed of two seven-character quatrains, which are written by Chen Chun to educate his children. These two poems point out the importance of education in childhood, and require their children to set up lofty aspirations from childhood.

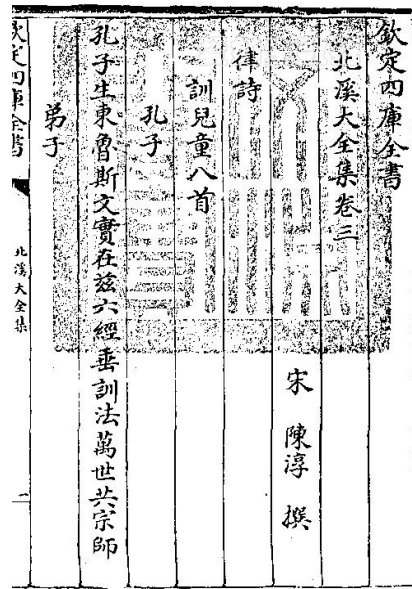


Figure 6. *Xun Er Tong Ba Shou*.

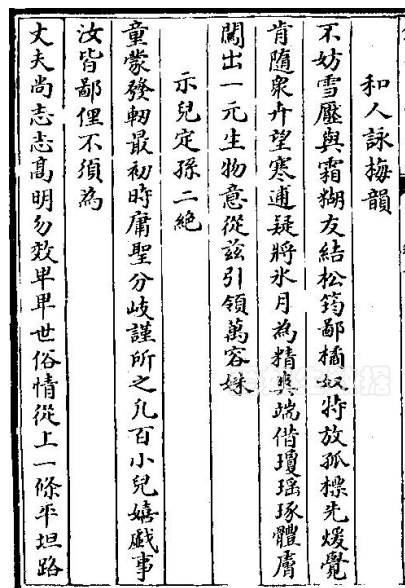


Figure 7. *Shi Er Ding Sun Er Jue*.

### 3. Chen Chun's Thoughts of Children's Education

#### 3.1. The Function of Children's Education

The function of education is mainly divided into ontological function and instrumental function. The ontological function is mainly embodied in the role of education in the socialization process of the educated. Hu Dehai defined it as "education, by transferring social and cultural norms of conduct to the new generation, enables them to acquire the corresponding roles in the future social structure in order to maintain the social operating mechanism and continue the social structure" (Hu, 2006). The ontological function mainly includes production guidance function, role training function, and the function of conveying social norms. The instrumental function of education mainly refers to its social function, including economic function, political function, cultural function, social stratification and change function. As the main inheritor and developer of Zhu Xi's educational thoughts, Chen Chun also inherited Zhu Xi's viewpoints on the function of children's education. They not only emphasized the role of children's education in training people and the function of conveying social norms, but they also emphasized the political, cultural and social stratification and change function of children's education.

In the role training of children in children's education, Chen Chun believed that through children's education, children could understand that people were divided into mediocre people and saints, but becoming saints should be everyone's goal. That is to say, through children's education, children could develop the role consciousness of becoming saints. Chen Chun also believed that elementary education could teach children to abide by social norms, which were the foundation of children's standing in society. Chen Chun lived in an era dominated by Neo-Confucianism of Cheng and Zhu. It is very important for children to learn and practice these social norms in primary school. In Chen Chun's *Xiaoxue Shili*, he disseminated these social norms to children from the way they treated parents and other elders, the relationship between men and women, and other etiquettes by the form of five-character poems. In the *Qimeng Chusong*, Chen Chun comprehensively explained the social norms advocated by Confucianism in the form of three rhymes.

In terms of the social function of education, Chen Chun emphasized the political function of children's education, that is, the role of children's education in maintaining social domination, mainly through the transmission of moral concepts recognized and advocated by the ruling class to children, for the purpose of cultivating talents in recognizing and maintaining social domination. Most of the Neo-Confucianists in Song Dynasty realized the ultimate requirement of maintaining social domination by emphasizing moral education in children's education. Chen Chun, a staunch supporter of Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism, embodied his political function of maintaining social rule in his *Xiaoxue Shili* and *Qimeng Chusong*. Chen Chun also advocated the function of social stratification and change in education, that is, the combination of social members



through education. First of all, through the education of children, everyone could have the qualities of a saint and become a member of the society, so as to achieve the stratification of social members of saints and mediocre people. In Chen Chun's *Shi Er Ding Sun Er Jue*, he believed that if children had lofty ideals, they could become saints, and if they imitated secular people in childhood, they would become mediocre person.

### 3.2. Contents of Children's Education

According to Chen Chun's reading materials and other materials reflecting his thoughts of children's education, the contents of children's education he advocated mainly include the following aspects:

**First, Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism.** In order to disseminated and developed Zhu Xi's theory of Neo-Confucianism, Chen Chun compiled a book entitled *Beixi Ziyi*, which was specially designed for introducing Neo-Confucianism to children. This book was regarded as an enlightening book before the study of *Sishu* in Yuan and Ming Dynasties. This book has made an important contribution to the dissemination of Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism. In addition to *Beixi Ziyi*, Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism can be seen everywhere in other children's books compiled by Chen Chun. For example, in Zhu Xi's *Notice for Children*, he believed that the basic education of children was to learn how to wear hats and coats, talking, walking, and so on, in a socially acceptable way. Chen Chun inherited Zhu Xi's thoughts in *Xiaoxue Shilis*. He also believed that the most important part of children's education was "etiquette". He also believed that the most important education of children's education was etiquette, cultivating children's concept of etiquette, so that they learned the corresponding social etiquette norms in daily life.

**Second, Norms of Conduct.** In the eyes of Zhu Xi and Chen Chun, the primary purpose of children's education was to let them learn to live in the world according to the requirements of society, which was the basis for their further development. Therefore, in the textbooks they compiled for children's education, they all put great emphasis on the norms of children's behavior. There were five chapters in Zhu Xi's textbook *Notice for Children's*. The first chapter was about the etiquette of wearing clothes and hats, and the second chapter was about the etiquette of talking and walking. The third chapter was about the etiquette of cleaning and chapter IV was about the etiquette of other everyday things (Zhu, 2002). Chen Chun inherited Zhu Xi's concept of children's daily ritual and embodied it. In the textbook *Xiaoxue Shilis*, he disseminated these social norms to children from the way treated parents and elders, the relationship between men and women, and other etiquette by the form of five-character poems. Thus, Chen Chun emphasized the education of children's behavior norms in primary education, which was the most basic learning content in primary education. Only after children mastered and learned these daily behavior norms in practice, could they further cultivate their interests in becoming learned people.

**Third, Confucian Ethics.** In the Song Dynasty, traditional Confucianism de-

veloped innovatively in the form of Neo-Confucianism. Zhu Xi, as the leading Neo-Confucianist, advocated “taking Confucian benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom and faith as the fundamental moral principle, demonstrating in different ways that Confucian moral principles had an inherent basis, and taking the principle of preserving nature and removing human desires as the basic” (Chen, 2011). Based on the basic idea of Neo-Confucianism, Zhu Xi, Chen Chun and other Neo-Confucianists paid attention to the education of Confucian ethics and morality in the children’s education. In Chen Chun’s view, the main content of children’s education was the ethical virtues such as benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and faith advocated by Confucianism.

In *Beixi Ziyi*, Chen Chun specially expounded the Confucian ideas of benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom and faith, loyalty and forgiveness. Chen Chun advocated Mencius’ theory of good nature, believing that human beings were born with good nature, that everyone has the qualifications to become a saint like Yao and Shun, and that there is no essential difference between saints and ordinary people. So how can we realize the transformation from mortals to saints? In the preamble of *Qimeng Chusong*, Chen Chun believed that it was the right direction to lead to the sage through the constant influence of Confucian ethics and morality and transforming it into daily action. Then, what specific Confucian ethics and morals does Chen Chun run through in his books? Among them, the core is the Confucian classic in *Daxue* advocated “*Ming Ming De*”, and the process of realizing it, that is, “character, knowledge, sincerity, integrity, self-cultivation, family unity, governing the country, and peace of the world” (Kong, 1999). To achieve this goal, Chen Chun believed that we need to learn from the saints of the previous generations, and at the same time, we should start from a small place to learn and practice the moral and etiquette norms followed by Confucianism. Among *Xun Er Tong Ba Shou*, the first four poems are entitled “Confucius”, “Disciples”, “Yanzi” and “Zengzi” (Chen, 1986). It can be seen that Chen Chun taught children to learn their good ethics and morality by taking Confucius, Zengzi and Yanzi as saints. However, it was not enough to simply understand the deeds of saints and the behavioral norms of social claims. It was also necessary to guide children to practice these norms from the practical level, so that they could internalize and externalize the Confucian ethics and morals embodied in these life norms in practice. In *Xiaoxue Shili*, Chen Chun wrote the concept of filial piety in Confucian ethics and morality with fourteen easy-to-understand five-character poems to guide children how to filial piety to their parents and respect their elders in daily life.

### 3.3. The Means of Children’s Education

Chen Chun advocated two types of education methods: reading and practice. Among them, reading was mainly a way to enable children to understand the content of learning. As time went by, these contents would be internalized. That was to say, through teachers’ and parents’ continuous teaching and children’s repeated reading of children’s books, it was as if they were the same result of life.



However, Zhu Xi, Chen Chun and other Neo Confucians not only wanted children to get acquainted with the knowledge, but they also wanted to enable children to apply these ideas in practice. In order to achieve the ultimate goal of education, Chen Chun inherited Zhu Xi's education method of children, and advocated guiding children to apply Confucian primary school work in practice. That was the practice teaching method we often talk about. Because the object of the education was relatively small, Chen Chun emphasized that this stage of learning was mainly based on practice, practising primary school daily etiquette advocated by Confucianism. Chen Chun regarded these primary school daily etiquette as the initial and key to realize the stage's learning. In the children's books, such as *Qimeng Chusong*, *Xun Er Tong Ba Shou*, *Xiaoxue Shili*, *Shu Shi Xue Zi*, *Shu Yue Yu Zhai Sheng*, Chen Chun explained the way of daily behavioral norms, and pointed out the concrete practice. In *Xiaoxue Shili*, Chen Chun put forward specific requirements for children's treatment of their parents, other elders or elder brothers from the aspects of manner, language, movement and so on. Children could act in accordance with social norms according to this requirement. It also made specific practice requirements for eating, meeting, visiting, and temporary funeral. *Shu Shi Xue Zi* mainly emphasized the specific requirements of children wearing clothes and hats.

#### 4. Conclusion

In terms of the function of the children's education, Chen Chun not only emphasized the role of the children's education in the cultivation of people and the function of conveying social norms, but he also emphasized the political, cultural and social stratification and change functions of the children's education. Chen Chun advocated the content of children's education mainly including Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism, norms of conduct and Confucian ethics. The main method of Chen Chun's children's education was to realize children's understanding of learning content by teaching and reciting, and to internalize these learning contents by repeated teaching and reciting. On this basis, these learning contents were transformed into concrete actions in life, deepening the understanding of Confucianism in concrete practice, and strengthening the Confucian advocated by Confucianism through practice.

#### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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