KEEPING FAMILY MEMBERS INFORMED

Letters to his eldest son by Zeng Guofan
曾國藩 (1811–1872)

Twelve letters written by the eminent scholar-general Zeng Guofan to his eldest son, Zeng Jize, between 1852 and 1865 let us see him as a concerned parent even when he was fully engaged in dealing with urgent political and military matters.

Zeng Guofan became one of the most prominent officials of the mid-nineteenth century. From Hunan, he passed the jinshi examination in 1838 and began his career in the capital, rising through a series of central government posts. In 1852, he was assigned to be the examiner for the provincial examinations in Jiangxi but on the way there learned that his mother had died, forcing him to take leave and return to Hunan for the mourning period. This was just when the Taiping rebellion was making rapid headway in the region. Soon he was persuaded to return to office and organize a militia in his home province. Brilliant at organization and planning, he created an army that proved effective in quelling the rebels. In 1860, he was made governor-general and commissioner in charge of suppressing the Taiping, an assignment
that required another four years of often very heavy fighting to complete. Throughout, he remained completely loyal to the Manchu court.

Several hundred of the letters that Zeng Guofan wrote to family members survive, ranging in date from 1840 to 1867. His was a large family, and he wrote not only to his parents and grandparents but also to his uncles, brothers, and sons. He did not address letters to his wife, sisters, or daughters, but if they were living at home, they undoubtedly also read the letters addressed to the men. Unlike the very brief letters written by ordinary people that were found among original documents from the Qin, Han, and Tang periods (see selection 4), these letters are often quite long. Zeng was a highly literate man, and when he was separated from his closest relatives, he often wrote lengthy letters to them. These letters let us see something of the private Zeng Guofan, such as how he handled the business of daily life, managed family relations, balanced work and family, and thought about his commitment to Confucian ideals. A historian trying to get a deeper understanding of Zeng would also want to bring in other personal accounts he wrote, as he also wrote letters to friends and colleagues and kept a diary.

Rather than provide a sample of letters to different relatives, here we include only a selection of the letters he wrote to his eldest son, Zeng Jize (1839–1890). They are arranged chronologically, dating from 1852, when Jize was fourteen sui (still twelve by Western counting), to 1865, when he was twenty-seven sui. Naturally, Zeng Guofan wrote to his son only when they were apart, so more letters survive from some periods than others. All but the first very long letter are translated here in full.

The father-son relationship was considered fundamental to both the patrilineal family system and Confucian ethics. Most interaction between fathers and sons naturally took place in person and has left no trace in written form. In addition, the documents that historians can draw on most often were written by the son, often after the death of the parent, and so have a retrospective quality. Zeng’s letters not only give us the father’s perspective but also are more immediate, less edited.

Zeng Guofan’s many efforts to shape Jize’s moral and intellectual development may deserve some of the credit for Jize’s own success as an official responsive to the needs of the time. Jize developed an interest in foreign affairs and became one of the first Qing officials to travel to Europe, serving as ambassador to England, France, and Russia from 1878 to 1886.
LETTERS TO JIZE

To my son Jize,

On the twenty-fifth day of the seventh month, on the road in Taihu County [Jiangsu], I was distraught and grieved on learning of my mother’s passing. The same day, I hired a small sedan chair and traveled sixty li. I got no sleep that night, writing letters to family members in the capital and making arrangements for everything. You and the other family members, after receiving condolences, should with all speed leave the capital. On the night of the twenty-sixth, I sent a letter to the capital with the Hubei Xizhou correspondence, and on the twenty-seventh, I sent another to the capital with the Fuzhou [Jiangxi] correspondence. The letters are largely the same, but the Jiangxi one gives more detail. It is just that fearing they might not arrive, I sent letters from both places. In the midst of my grief, I haven’t been able to think of everything, but here are some tasks I have thought of:

I estimate that a list of those who owe me money would come to about a thousand [taels?]....

Hire two mule carts. Your mother and Jihong can ride in one, the wet-nurse and Sister Five and Sister Six can take the other....

Cotton clothes must be made for the young children. It will definitely be cold traveling in the tenth month, especially while on the boat....

While on the boat, the greatest fear is robbers. When I was in Jiujiang, Dehua County [both in Jiangxi], I sent someone to act as a guard....

The eighth day of the eighth month of the second year of the Xianfeng reign [1852], while on a boat in Qizhou [Hubei].

To Jize,

On the eighth, I wrote a letter while on the boat, and on the morning of the eleventh arrived at Huangzhou [Hubei]. Because we were obstructed by the wind for a long time, I hired a small sedan chair to climb up the bank. On the twelfth, at midday, we got to the Hubei provincial seat, where we met an old friend of Chang Nangai’s, from whom I learned the news from Hunan, that Changsha was under siege and in danger, that the road was obstructed and travel blocked. I was overcome by grief and distress.

Now I am staying in Wuchang [Hubei] for a while, but at present, family members should definitely not leave the capital. We can discuss this again
early next year. After condolences are completed, move to a small house. I will find a way to send you money regularly for your expenses.

Written in haste; I will write again in a day or two.

The twelfth day of the eighth month of the second year of the Xianfeng reign [1852], at night, sent from Wuchang.

To my son Jize,

Hu Er and the others have arrived, bringing your letter. Your calligraphy still has not improved much. This year you are eighteen sui, full-grown with your teeth all in, but your studies are not progressing. The son of my relative through marriage Chen Daiyun, called Jisheng, started school this year, and the academy ranked his poem at the top of the class. Since he was born in the wuxu year, he is only one year older than you. Because he lost his parents, his family has declined into poverty, which made him work hard at study and achieve a name for himself at a young age. In your case, you have benefited from the privileges accrued by your grandfather and father, you have had plenty of clothes and food and no worries, so you willingly seek careless pleasure and do not apply yourself to reading books or establishing your character. The ancients said, “If one works hard, his mind will turn toward the good; lack of discipline gives rise to excessive desires.” Mencius said, “People survive through adversity, perish in ease and comfort.” I worry that you go too far in the direction of carelessness.

Your wife just entered our household. She should be instructed to enter the kitchen to cook and to be diligent in spinning and weaving. She should not think that as a child of the rich and high ranking there is nothing she has to do. Are your three younger sisters already able to make large shoes? Your three sisters and your wife should make a pair of shoes for me every year to express their filial and respectful concern. They each should work hard at needlework. Have the cloth they weave made into clothes and sent to me, which will let me see the diligence of those in the women’s quarters.

Even while I am with the army, I do not let up studying and both read books and practice calligraphy, never neglecting them for long. Still, I regret that as I grow older I don’t improve very much. Since you are still young, time is golden—don’t waste any of it! Get someone to sell the fields that were bought in Hengyang [Hunan] two years ago, then send the money to the military camp so that I can pay back the Li family. When one’s parents
are alive, one should not have private possessions; this is true for both literati and commoners. How much more is this true given that I am a high official!

My skin problem has recurred, but is not as bad as last fall.

Li Ciqing was defeated on the sixteenth in Fuzhou [Jiangxi], which I already related in my letter to Uncle Yuan. I am presently in Chongren [Jiangxi], working on how to handle reorganization. On the thirtieth, we had a victory, but we are short of provisions. The situation is at a critical point, keeping me worried.

Whenever you get a chance, write, and whenever you write, tell me everything going on—don’t be too cursory! How grandfather is doing, the news of the whole family, what you have been studying at the academy—give lots of details. Be sure to keep this in mind!

The second day of the tenth month of the sixth year of the Xianfeng reign [1856].

To my son Jize,

On the nineteenth, Zeng Six came to the camp and delivered your letter number five from the seventh along with a poem, letting me know everything. You mentioned that you would enter the examination hall the next day and that everything was ready. So I figure you must have already left the examination hall and returned home. On the eighth, I arrived at the mouth of the river, originally thinking I would enter Fujian via Qian Mountain then attack Chongan [Fujian]. This plan has already been submitted to the imperial court. The Guangze bandits had been causing disturbances in Jiangxi and were reaching the three counties of Luxi, Jinxí, and Anren [Hunan and Jiangxi] and have a base at Anren [Hunan]. On the fourteenth, I sent Zhang Kaizhang to wipe them out. On the fifteenth, I also returned to Yiyang [Jiangxi] to wait until Anren was destroyed, then enter Fujian through the Luxi-Yunji pass.

To my pleasure, I found your poem written in the seven-syllable ancient style to be serene in spirit and confident in language. Generally, one should pay close attention to the tone patterns when writing poetry. I have selected nine authors of five-syllable ancient verse and six authors of the seven-syllable ancient verse whose poems are so euphonic that people can read them hundreds of times without being bored. As to those I did not select—such as the five-syllable ancient verses of Zuo Si (Daichong), Jiang Yan (Wencong), Chen Zi'ang, Liu Zongyuan (Zihou), and the seven-syllable ancient verses
of Bao Zhao (Mingyuan), Gao Shi (Dafu), Wang Wei (Mojie), and Lu You (Fangweng)—they are also extraordinary in their tone patterns. If you wish to compose five- or seven-syllable ancient-style poems, you must read dozens of them. First, recite them out loud in order to feel their vitality, then softly chant the verses in order to appreciate their mood. If you do both of these things, you will accustom your own tongue to the tones of the ancients. As a result, when you compose poetry, the tones of your verses will be in harmony with those of the ancients. When you read your poems aloud, you will find them melodic and readable. Gradually, you will develop a keen interest in writing poetry yourself. The ancients said, “After completing and polishing a poem, one should recite it out loud.” Furthermore, they said, “Before one completes a poem, he should slowly chant it to himself.” From this, you can see that in writing poetry, the ancients put much effort into tone qualities. Word poetry is sounds made by man; wordless poetry is the sounds of nature. If you understand this and can bring together the sounds of man and the sounds of nature, then you have reached the halfway mark in mastering the art of composing poetry.

You wrote that you enjoy practicing your calligraphy. This is a good habit to develop! But lately the color of your ink has not been as smooth and uniform as it was in the spring and summer of last year. From now on, when you write, pay close attention to the quality of your ink. The skillful calligraphers of the past were experts in achieving good ink quality, so that their shiny and glossy calligraphy seemed to float on top of the paper. Diligent practice and concentration made this possible. Furthermore, the age and viscosity of their ink and the speed with which the masters wrote also contributed to the freshness and brightness of their calligraphy.

All my life, I have been ashamed of three things. Although my studies have been wide-ranging, I have no knowledge of astronomy or mathematics. I cannot even recognize the fixed stars and the five latitudes. This is the first thing I am ashamed of. In managing affairs, I have never been able to carry everything through to completion. This is the second thing I am ashamed of. When I was young and practiced calligraphy, I never devoted myself to any single school; therefore, my style is variable and weak. In addition, I write clumsily and slowly, so I cannot write for any practical purpose. And during these last years in the army, I have been negligent and sometimes do not practice at all. This is the third thing that I am ashamed of. If you are a son who is worthy of our family, you should want to help your father make up for
these three deficiencies. Although calculation and mathematics are difficult to comprehend, the fixed stars and five latitudes can be easily recognized. There are several books that discuss astronomy, such as the astronomy sections of the seventeen dynastic histories, and the sections on observation of heavenly bodies and calendar making in *The Complete Examination of the Five Rites* (Wuli tongkao). If you can commit to memory two or three fixed stars each night, in a few months you will know them all.

Whatever you do, big or small, simple or difficult, you should see it through to the end. In practicing your calligraphy, it is more important to achieve round and smooth strokes than great speed. If you can write ten thousand words a day in regular script, or at least seven to eight thousand words, then your hand will be able to handle the brush with ease because the more you practice, the more familiar you will get with the strokes. You can make use of this skill in your studies because you will be able to copy numerous books. In the future, in your official life, this skill will enable you to record cases and documents, and there are countless other benefits to be gained from having a smooth and fast hand. If you can accomplish these three things, you will be compensating for my shortcomings.

Since this is your first attempt at the civil service examinations, it does not matter much whether you pass or fail. Afterward, read the commentaries to *The Classic of Poetry* (Shijing). Afterward, you should study the classics and histories together. The books written by the great scholars Gu [Yanwu], Yan [Ruoqu], Jiang [Yong], Dai [Zhen], Duan [Yucai], and Wang [Niansun] should be closely studied and scrutinized.

Every moment is worth a thousand pieces of gold. From now on, when you write to me, let me know what is on your mind, or explain briefly what you have read or studied recently. That way, your letters will let me see how well you are getting on with your studies. Take your time and do not send letters that are too short. This is my wish.

On the twentieth day of the third month of the eighth year of the Xianfeng reign [1858].

To my son Jize,

I have received your letters of the nineteenth and twenty-ninth, so I know that your wedding has taken place and the new bride has been able to gain your mother’s approval. This is a blessing for our family.

Our dynasty has had sage emperors one after another, who regularly got
up at 4 a.m. This practice hasn’t changed for two centuries. In our family, from my great-great-grandfather to my father, all got up early. Great-grandfather and Grandfather both got up before dawn and would sit in the cold winter for an hour before the sky brightened. My father also got up before the sun and, if there were things to do, would not wait for the dawn. Every night, he would rise and take a look a couple of times to check on the time, lest he get up late, something you witnessed yourself. Recently, I have also been getting up before dawn in order to continue the family tradition. Since you have now been capped and have married, you should make getting up early a priority. If you make an effort to do this, you will also be setting an example for your new bride.

All my life, I have had the failing of inconstancy, so that many goals were never accomplished. I am deeply ashamed of the virtues I have not perfected and the tasks I have not completed. Since I began leading troops, which was never part of my original ambition, this failing has gotten worse, to my great regret. If you want to achieve something, you must take to heart the two words “be constant.”

I once closely observed how Grandfather’s deportment stood out—it can be summed up in the word “weighty.” My way of walking is also rather weighty, probably because I model myself on Grandfather. Your deportment is very casual. Since this is a major flaw, you should constantly keep it in mind. Whether you are walking or sitting, you should be serious. Getting up early, being constant, and being serious: these three are all things you need to work on. Getting up early is a family tradition passed down from our forebears. Not following through is my great shame. Not being serious is a shortcoming of yours. For these reasons, I am making the point to earnestly admonish you concerning them.

In my previous letter, I answered three of your questions on changing brushes while doing calligraphy, the phrase “daring to tell the horse to go,” and the pluses and minuses of commentaries, going on at some length. Why do you say nothing about that in your letter? From now on, when you get a letter from me that offers instruction, you could respond point by point, not abbreviating. For more advice, see the piece that I sent to Teacher Deng Yinjie on looking, reading aloud, and writing.

The fourteenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year of the Xianfeng reign [1859], handwritten by Disheng [Zeng Guofan’s title].
To my sons Jize and Jihong,

I received your mother’s and Uncle Cheng's letters on the twenty-ninth day of the tenth month. I also received the padded cotton shoes and two bags of dried melon seeds. From the letters, I know that everyone at home is well and how Jize was stranded in Hankou [Hubei] for six days due to the strong wind. But I suppose he is home by now. Jize should always remember, “In action there must be dignity; in speech there must be deliberation.” Do not neglect this even for a moment.

These days, nothing is disturbing my peace. The two armies under Generals Bao and Zhang also are not currently engaged. Zuo Zongtang’s army won a victory in Guixi on the twenty-second of last month. And on the twenty-ninth, he won yet another small victory at Dexing [both in Jiangxi]. However, the rebel forces are still strong, and I am very worried about that. They have flocked together to attack Jiande [Zhejiang], where General Pu is stationed. If Generals Zuo and Pu can hold them off, I feel the situation will stabilize everywhere else.

Jize, you have a gift for calligraphy, but your style lacks strength. Therefore, devote some time to practice, because it will be a shame to abandon something you have natural talent for.

Remember everyone in the house, regardless of age, should get up early.

I did not write to Uncle Cheng this time, so please tell him my situation here.

Fourth of the eleventh month of the tenth year of the Xianfeng reign [1860].

To my sons Jize and Jihong,

I received your letters of the twenty-fourth of the first month and know all of you are well. The military situation here has been critical since the eleventh month of last year. But fortunately, we were able to pass through that crisis safely. At present, only Zuo Zongtang’s army stationed at Jingdezhen [Jiangxi] is in great danger, but the rest of us are reasonably safe. I will soon move our armies to the Dongliu and Jiande regions [both in Zhejiang].

Enclosed are eight taels; buy some good tea, and send it to me now and then.

Have you begun to plant more bamboo? I hope that you have planted some around the hill behind our house to make it look the way it did in my father’s time. I cut down all the bamboo four years ago because I thought it
was blocking the sun from shining into our hall. But I have regretted that act ever since because, after it was cut down, the hall was still as dark as ever. That is why I am asking you to plant bamboo again.

Are you keeping in mind those two words: “effort” and “modesty”?

On the fourteenth of the second month of the eleventh year of the Xian-feng reign [1861].

To my son Jize,

Hu Bida and Xie Rongfang arrived here on the twentieth of the eighth month, and from them I received three letters from your uncle Cheng, your mother, and you. In addition, I received *The Works of 103 Scholars of the Han and Wei Dynasties* (Han Wei baisan jia) and three pieces of your calligraphy of *Preface to the Sacred Teachings* (Shengjiao xu). On the twenty-second, Tan Zairong arrived, and from him I received the two letters from your uncle Cheng and you. So I am up-to-date on the latest news from the family.

Cai Yingwu drowned in the Yangzi River at Jingkou [Jiangsu]. His death was unexpected and tragic. In addition to his provision of three taels, I also am sending twenty taels to aid his family, eight taels for the funeral expenses of Zhu Yunsi’s mother, and ten taels as a present for Hui’s daughter, Yizhen, who is to be married this coming winter. Deliver these to the respective people.

Your elder sister is supposed to get married on the third day of the twelfth month. Have the Yuans agreed on that date yet? I have already set the dowry at two hundred taels; now I am forwarding one hundred taels for your sister to purchase clothes and other articles. The remaining one hundred taels I shall send next time, along with funds to cover the cost of transportation between our house and the Yuans’ and the wedding gift for Niece Sixty.

Thrift is the only way to maintain a household over a long period of time. It is particularly important to avoid luxuries during times of social instability. Do not prepare unnecessary clothes, and keep the clothes you buy simple and not overly adorned. Instruct your younger sisters to heed my words, and our family will survive for a long time.

Since Uncle Muyun wishes a post at a private academy, I have written to entrust the matter to Vice Censor-in-Chief Yun for his assistance in the matter. When Uncle Yuan returns to Changsha on leave, ask him to mention this again to him. I do not think there will be any difficulties.
I have been healthy. On the twenty-first day, I wore coarse mourning garments for a funeral. Even though the three days of morning is over, my skin condition is still giving me a lot of discomfort. Every night, I scratch incessantly. Fortunately, it is not infected. Uncle Man was suffering from malaria, but he recovered on the twenty-second.

I did not write to your uncle Cheng this time, so show him this letter from me.

On the twenty-fourth of the eighth month of the eleventh year of the Xianfeng reign [1861].

To Jize,

On the twentieth, I received the letters that you and your uncle Cheng had posted on the second of the fifth month. On the twenty-second, I received a letter from your uncle Cheng posted from Hengzhou [Hunan]. From these letters, I learned that everyone in our household is well and the third daughter’s marriage took place.

In your letter, you said you are quite worried about your brother-in-law, Mr. Yuan. I myself never expected him to turn out so bad. I shall write a letter to admonish him. It would not be appropriate for those of you at home to expose your feelings too directly in front of him. A man who still cares for his reputation wants the respect of others. If people show only their high-minded contempt for him, he will no longer care and will place himself in opposition to morally upright people. If he reaches that state, he will be quite beyond any hope of reform. Therefore, everyone in the family, both Zengs and relatives through marriage, both adults and children, must treat Mr. Yuan courteously. If he still shows no improvement in his behavior, I shall take him to my military camp in Anhui and hire a teacher to instruct him.

Generally speaking, children of notable families should not be given a lot of money and clothes. Although these are minor issues, they can have great influence upon them.

The military situation on all fronts is stable. General Duo led his army to assist our soldiers in Shaanxi. Your uncle Yuan’s army is now stationed in Jinling [Jiangsu]. I am worried about him because his army is isolated. Hu-zhou [Zhejiang] was lost to the rebels on the third. General Bao is attacking Ningguo [Jiangxi] but is having difficulty in recapturing it. Anhui has been suffering from severe drought, but just recently rain fell for three days, so
the people’s morale is getting better. We have been purchasing our rice from Changsha [Hunan], so your uncle Cheng need not worry. Remember to tell him this, since I am not writing to him this time.

Twenty-fourth day of the fifth month of the first year of the Tongzhi reign [1862].

To Jize and Jihong,

I have not received any letters from you recently. I hope everyone in our family is well. With regard to the current military situation, the siege of Jinling was lifted on the fifth, and therefore our camp is quiet. However, Uncle Man has not recovered from his illness. There are three other places where the situation is critical. The first is Ningguo [Jiangxi], where General Bao and General Zhang have their two armies. Their supply lines have been cut by the enemy, and we cannot get reinforcements to them. The second place is Jingde [Anhui], where General Zhu Pinlong’s army is quartered. He is also short of supplies and under rebel attack from all sides. The third place is the rebel-occupied Jiufu Island [Jiangsu], where the rebel forces have moved to the north bank, which I am afraid Li Shizhong will not be able to defend. Achieving victory in these three places will be difficult.

I have been worrying a great deal the last two months. Plus, my toothache is very severe and my spirits have been even lower than they were in the spring of the eighth year [1858], when I was at home, and the spring of the tenth year [1860], when I was in Qimen [Anhui]. You will be coming here in the new year; perhaps seeing you will cheer me up.

Do you feel that your walk is more dignified than before? Do you deliberate before you open your mouth to speak? Is Jihong learning to write poetry? Is my son-in-law Mr. Yuan staying home more often? When you come, perhaps you can bring Mr. Yuan and my nephew Jiner with you.

On the twenty-fourth day of the tenth month of the first year of the Tongzhi reign [1862].

To Jize and Jihong,

I sailed from Shaobo [Jiangsu] on the fourth and arrived at Qingjiangpu [Jiangsu] on the eighth. I heard that the three groups of Nian bandits led by Zhang, Ren, and Niu have reached the areas around Meng and Bo [both Anhui]. Ying Fangbo’s army has been surrounded by the bandits in Zhiheji [Anhui], and Yi Kaijun’s army has been under attack by them on two fronts
in Mengcheng [Anhui]. Therefore, it is very difficult to get supplies to them.
I have asked Changqi to move the navy from Great Marsh Lake to Linhuai
[Anhui]. I am staying here waiting for the arrival of Luo and Liu’s armies,
and then I shall proceed to Xuzhou [Jiangsu].

When you serve your mother at home, always remember to be industrious
and frugal. In your relationships with people, you must be humble and pru-
dent. As a general rule, old families go into decline when members are no lon-
ger hardworking and frugal—and this is usually first seen in the women. When
I was home, I was quite concerned by the fact that the women of our house
tend to want a more opulent lifestyle. Since you two have pledged yourselves
to maintain our family’s reputation, you must begin by instructing your wives.

I am fairly well except for my ringworm, which is getting slightly worse.

Ninth day of the fifth intercalary month, in the fourth year of the Tongzhi
reign [1865].

To Jize,

I received both your letters, from which I learned all the latest news. I
am pleased to hear that your mother has recovered from her illness and my
grandson in the Luo family is doing well.

I have been in Qingjiang [Jiangsu] for eleven days now. There are distur-
bances here over unpaid wages, since Liu Songshan has not yet arrived with
the payroll. These disturbances have delayed my departure. Lately there has
been nothing to be alarmed about in Zhihe and Mengcheng. Luo Maotang
and others have already departed by land for Linhuai. I myself plan to leave
here by water for Linhuai on the twenty-first if Liu Songshan arrives by then.

My health is fine, but I am greatly worried about the unrest over the unpaid
wages in the Hunan army. It is like holding a spear that, if not stopped, will
eventually destroy you. This is causing me a great deal of concern day after day.
Jiang Zhichun’s army has revolted in Hubei, and I am afraid that will help stir
up agitation elsewhere and cause unrest in the Xiangxiang region [Hunan]. I
still cannot decide on the right policy for punishing those guilty in that revolt.

I have written to Xiaocen that Yiqing should pay fifty taels to Yang Jian-
shan. I have also written a letter to Yiqing and instructed him to pay my old
friend Shao and all the others on a monthly basis. The only person not on
that list is Wang Shuxiang, who is to be paid every season. After Liu Boshan’s
book company is dissolved, I plan to find a post for him. But I have not heard
about its final date.
Do not entertain visitors at home. How much do you spend for household expenses each month? Are the wives and daughters spinning and weaving every day? Do they have regular tasks? Report these things to me next time.

Recently I have not been eating meat at dinner. Instead I stew one or two kinds of vegetables in a meat broth until they are quite tender. The taste can’t be beat, and it is also good for my health. (One does not have to eat expensive foods. Good taste should be enough to nourish a man.) Try this method, and cook some for your mother. (My grandfather used to pick fresh vegetables at sunset and cook them for dinner. When I ate with him, I found them particularly good. Now I cook the vegetables in a meat broth, but they still do not taste as good as I remember.) The younger generation should not eat meat for the evening meal. Eating vegetables plain without any meat broth is healthy as well as frugal.

Yan Zhitui’s Family Instruction (Yan shi jiaxun) was written in a time of chaos. Zhang Ying wrote his Maxims (Congxunzhai yu) during a time of peace. These two books have detailed instructions for educating every family member. Your brothers should have a copy of each and read them regularly. Then you will make progress every day.

Nineteenth day, fifth month, the fourth year of the Tongzhi reign [1865].


Further Reading