

The Ice Mirror: The Art of Reading People (Complete Pure Translation)

Canon Edition: Statesman Zeng Guofan (Pure English Edition) | Period: Qing Dynasty Classical Canon (c. 1860 CE)

Overview: The legendary masterwork on character appraisal and physiognomy written by the eminent statesman Zeng Guofan. Comprising the complete seven canonical scrolls: Spirit and Bone, Firmness and Softness, Demeanor, Voice, Vital Aura, The Gaze, and Composure.

CANONICAL CHAPTERS & PURE TRANSLATED TEXT

1. Scroll 1: Shen Gu — The Internal Spirit and the Bone Framework (y^hŝ{ÇQhSw)

PURE CANONICAL TRANSLATION:

A person's entire spiritual vitality is gathered in the two eyes; a person's entire structural bone foundation is revealed in the facial framework.

In observing bones, distinguish between the round and the sharp, the solid and the brittle.

The skull should be exalted and rounded without jagged deformities; the forehead should rise like an ancient wall, smooth and receptive to celestial light.

The cheekbones should rise gently into the temples without piercing the flesh like dry daggers.

If the bone structure is proud, upright, and harmoniously covered by healthy muscle, that person possesses the endurance of a prime minister.

If the bones protrude harshly like dried branches and the eyes dart about in suspicious agitation, that person will encounter chronic betrayal and violent reversal.

The spirit (Shen) manifests in two conditions: Clarity (Qing) and Turbidity (Zhuo).

The clear spirit is like a sunlit autumn lake: deep, tranquil, illuminating pebbles on the bed without ripple.

The turbid spirit is like a muddy swamp: restless, flickering with artificial enthusiasm, and easily clouded by alcohol and anger.

When assessing an associate in times of peace, examine their bone structure to know their capacity.

When assessing an associate in times of catastrophic crisis, examine their eye spirit to know whether they will stand firm or flee.

PHILOSOPHICAL INSIGHTS:

Zeng Guofan's opening doctrine: cosmetic beauty is superficial and misleading. The true judge of human character pierces through cosmetic flesh to evaluate skeletal architecture and spiritual clarity.

2. Scroll 2: Gang Rou — The Balancing of Firmness and Softness (R gÔ{ÇQhSw)

PURE CANONICAL TRANSLATION:

Having discerned the spirit and the bone, one must immediately distinguish between firmness (Gang) and softness (Rou).

Firmness and softness are the physical dynamic of Yin and Yang in human temperament.

There is masculine firmness and feminine firmness; there is pure softness and corrupt softness.

Firmness without softness is like brittle iron: it shatters at the first unforeseen earthquake.

Softness without firmness is like rotten wood: it cannot support the weight of a modest roof beam.

The highest human constitution possesses the unbending resolve of forged steel inside, cloaked in the gentleness of spring rain on the outside.

When you meet an individual whose speech is quiet, courteous, and deferential, yet whose ethical decisions are as unshakeable as granite, you stand before a pillar of the nation.

Conversely, he who shouts commands, struts with puffed chest, and boasts of ruthlessness possesses brittle hollow bones; at the first touch of real hardship, he will break and beg for mercy.

Observe also how a person handles subordinates: the noble leader applies gentle encouragement to nurture confidence, backed by unbending standards of excellence.

PHILOSOPHICAL INSIGHTS:

Real power is quiet. Brittle bluster is the hallmark of internal cowardice, while true inner strength allows an individual to remain courteous and calm under pressure.

3. Scroll 3: Rong Mao — Demeanor, Posture, and Facial Proportions (𠄎𠄎𠄎𠄎)

PURE CANONICAL TRANSLATION:

Demeanor (Rong) encompasses the kinetic posture of the entire body; appearance (Mao) begins with the symmetry of the facial features.

The human face is divided into Three Stops (San Ting):

1. The Upper Stop: From the hairline to the eyebrows (governing youth, intellectual inheritance, and parental blessing). It must be broad and lofty.
2. The Middle Stop: From the eyebrows to the base of the nose (governing middle age, executive enterprise, and enterprise). It must be straight, proud, and balanced.
3. The Lower Stop: From the nose to the chin (governing later years, emotional fulfillment, and descendants). It must be rounded, solid, and fertile.

The Five Officials must harmonize:

The ears must be thick and clearly rimmed, higher than the eyebrows, like white jade ornaments.

The eyebrows must be sleek, orderly, and graceful like crescent moons, never tangling or pressing down aggressively upon the eyes.

The nose is the sovereign lord of the face: straight like a suspended gall, with fleshy rounded wings, anchoring financial mastery and moral integrity.

The mouth must be shaped like a drawn bow: crimson in vitality, teeth white and straight, smiling with benevolent warmth.

Observe a person's walk: they should walk like a great ship sailing smoothly across calm seas, torso upright, steps measured and firm.

Observe a person's sitting posture: they should sit like a towering mountain anchored into the continents, motionless and unshakeable.

PHILOSOPHICAL INSIGHTS:

The body speaks before words are spoken. Balanced facial proportions and dignified physical composure command social respect and inspire natural confidence in partners.

4. Scroll 4: Xin Sheng — Vocal Resonance and the Internal Mind (𠄎𠄎𠄎𠄎)

PURE CANONICAL TRANSLATION:

The voice of a human being is like the ringing of a sacred bronze temple bell.

A bell cast from pure bronze sounds deep, resonant, and clear even when heard across mountain ridges.

A bell cracked by fire or cast with impure slag sounds shrill, hollow, broken, and metallic.

Voice originates in the deepest dantian of the abdomen, ascends through the lungs, and rings forth through the throat.

He whose voice originates from the deep abdomen possesses boundless moral stamina, emotional stability, and the ability to command legions in battle.

He whose voice originates only in the throat, gasping for breath between sentences, possesses shallow

conviction, chaotic nerves, and will break under cross-examination.

Listen also to the speed of speech:

The wise person speaks at a measured, tranquil cadence, leaving space for reflection.

The deceitful person speaks in rapid, hurried bursts, seeking to confuse the listener before the lie is detected.

To know the absolute truth of a candidate's character, listen to their voice in darkness when visual impressions cannot deceive you: the vocal timbre never lies.

PHILOSOPHICAL INSIGHTS:

Acoustics are physiological truth. In executive hiring and partnerships, listen to whether a candidate's voice stays anchored in the chest or rises into anxious throat tension.

5. Scroll 5: Qi Po — Vital Energy, Aura, and Magnanimity (l >D{ÇQhSw)

PURE CANONICAL TRANSLATION:

Energy (Qi) is the supreme commander of life; the soul-force (Po) is the sovereign guardian of the body.

When a person's vital energy is expansive, their skin shines with subtle amber luster, and their presence transforms the room before a word is spoken.

When vital energy is depleted by chronic anxiety, dissipation, or hidden malice, the complexion turns dusty gray, resembling wood covered in chimney soot.

Magnanimity (Po) is tested exclusively in the furnace of catastrophe:

When sudden disaster strikes, does the person panic, blame subordinates, and weep in public? Or do they stand calm, review logistics, and inspire courage in the weary?

When extraordinary triumph arrives, does the person brag, boast, and indulge in petty vengeance? Or do they bow in gratitude, share rewards with the team, and remain vigilant against pride?

The expansive aura is born from three fountains: physical health preserved through discipline, clean conscience devoid of hidden crimes, and broad historical perspective.

PHILOSOPHICAL INSIGHTS:

Aura is not mystical theater. It is the physiological radiance of integrity, physical vitality, and emotional mastery under pressure.

6. Scroll 6: Yan Guang — The Gaze, Pupils, and Visual Intent (vîQI{ÇQhSw)

PURE CANONICAL TRANSLATION:

The eyes are the direct sun and moon of the body; the gaze is the naked emission of the spirit.

There are five distinct categories of the human gaze:

1. The Clear and Steady Gaze: Looking directly into the companion's eyes with calm, benevolent focus. Sign of uncorrupted conscience, supreme loyalty, and high intellect.
2. The Restless and Darting Gaze: Looking sideways, checking exits, scanning the floor. Sign of calculation, guilt, secret envy, and unreliability under temptation.
3. The Glaring and Aggressive Gaze: Staring with unblinking hostility to intimidate others. Sign of inner insecurity, explosive temper, and impending self-destruction.
4. The Muddy and Stupefied Gaze: Dull pupils, eyelids heavy without reason. Sign of intellectual lethargy, addiction, and exhaustion of kidney essence.
5. The Luminous and Smiling Gaze: Radiating natural warmth, compassion, and deep curiosity. Sign of generous fortune and creative genius.

When delivering unexpected or shocking news to an applicant, watch their immediate glance before they have time to arrange their facial muscles: that single instant reveals their true soul.

PHILOSOPHICAL INSIGHTS:

Before words can formulate an alibi, the micro-movements of the pupils and eyelids tell the unedited truth about

loyalty, fear, and integrity.

7. Scroll 7: Dong Jing — Composure in Action and Poise in Stillness (R—Y{ÇQhSw)

PURE CANONICAL TRANSLATION:

Movement and stillness are the ultimate manifestation of character in the arena of time.

In action, be swift, precise, and decisive like an eagle stooping upon prey, yet leave behind no trail of chaotic debris.

In stillness, be deep, tranquil, and rooted like an ancient bronze tripod or a mountain lake at twilight.

The mediocre person fidgets in stillness—tapping feet, biting lips, checking phones—and loses their head in action, creating frenzy without progress.

The superior person acts with profound stillness in their heart, and rests with vigilant readiness in their soul.

Observe how an associate handles small daily routines:

How do they fold garments? How do they handle utensils? How do they sit when alone in an anteroom?

He who is disciplined, graceful, and considerate in private trivia will prove invincible when commanded to govern provinces.

He who masters composure in action and poise in stillness commands both his own destiny and the enduring reverence of generations.

PHILOSOPHICAL INSIGHTS:

The master climax of Zeng Guofan's Ice Mirror: supreme character is the seamless integration of unshakeable inner peace with decisive, ethical execution in the world.
