八章
Eight Songs for Western Keyboard

Lyrics by 利瑪竇 Matteo Ricci

With character by character interpretation. Fluent translation at

Music adapted by John Thompson, based largely on the melody
墨子悲歌 Mozi Bei Ge in
伯牙新法 Boya Xinfa (1609)

1. My promises are above 吾願在上，一章
(See 1609 Sec. 1) slow and fleg

誰 認 人類 之 情 也？
Who can know man's circumstances?

Ren 者, 乃 反 樹 耳。
People are just the opposite of trees,

Shu 之 根 本 在 地, 而 從 土 受 養,
A tree's roots are in the earth, so it receives nourishment.

其 幹 枝 向 天 而 稽。
Its trunk & branches respectfully incline.

人 之 根 本 向 乎 天, 而 自 天 承 育,
People's roots incline towards heaven, thus from heaven receive nurture.

其 幹 枝 垂 下。
Their trunks & branches extend downwards.

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1. (cont.)

君子之知，知上帝始者，
Civilized people’s knowledge is knowing what Above Supreme Ruler does (know).

君子之学，学上帝者，
Civilized people’s learning is what can be learned of God’s learning.

君子之学，学上帝者，

因以择诲众也。
thus one uses this in selecting how to instruct the people.

上帝之心，惟多憐恤蒼生，
God’s heart only has great sympathy for the common people.

上帝之心，惟多憐憫蒼生，

少許霹靂聲傷人，
very seldom (lets) rumbling thunder harm people.

少許霹靂聲傷人，

當使日月照，而照無私方矣！
Since (God) causes the sun and moon to shine down, so it shines not in private places, ah!

當使雨雪降，而降無私田兮！
(God) often causes rain and snow to fall, but it falls not on private fields, ah!
2. A shepherd boy wandering in the hills

(See 1609 Sec. 2, part 1)

slower but more rhythmic

牧童，牧童，易居者。
Shepherd boy, shepherd boy, change living place / possible changing oneself does it make?

汝何往而能离己乎？
You in this way leave and thus able to leave behind yourself eh?

You (and) joy from the heart sprout up,
2. (cont.)
(See 1609 Sec. 2, part 2)

Heart peaceful then anywhere happy, heart troubled then anywhere sad.

A speck of dust enters the eye (and) a person quickly is annoyed by it,

but you are tolerant with a piercing the heart’s sharp awl, ch?

Having outside yearning for yourself, certainly not you will come to you attain, ah.

Why not control your own heart, thus peace on (your) original hill, ch?

Old and new writings all point out one thing, you traveling away has no advantage,
3. The proper way to calculate longevity

善知計壽修何？不徒數年月更多。
Well know calculating longevity or not? Not merely count years & months more & less;

惟以德行之積，盛量己之長也。
instead use virtuous action's accumulation (as the) best measure its own 's length.

不肖百紀，( )
Not (having) even 100 years,

執及賢者一日之長哉！
grapsed by worthy ones (is) each day 's length, ah!

有為者，其身雖未久經世，
There are productive ones, their bodies although not long time spent in society,

而足稱耆耄矣。
but it is sufficient to equal (those living into their)

上帝加我一日，
(If) Above Supreme Ruler adds for me one (extra) day,
(3. cont)

以我改前日之非，
(yi wo gai qian ri zhi fei,)
(it is) so I can change yesterday’s errors,

而進於德域一步。
(er jin yu de yu zhi bu.)
and thus go forward into a virtuous domain one (more) step.

設令我空費寸尺之寶,
(she ling wo kong fei cun chi zhi bao,)
If it causes me empty to waste a small amount of precious (time).

因歲之集, 集己之咎,
(yin sui zhi ji, jin ji zhi jiu,)
and thus the years’ accumulation, is an accumulation itself of the faults.

夫誠負上主之慈旨矣。
(fu cheng fu shang zhi ci yi.)
Now this certainly goes against Above Lord’s compassionate purpose ah.

嗚呼！恐再復禱壽。壽不可得之，
(Wu hu! Kong zai fu dao shou. Shou bu ke de zhi,)
Alas! I fear again (and) again praying for a long life. Long life is not: can take it,

非我福也。
( (that) is not wo fu ye,)
(that) is not my good fortune, ah.
4. The valiant art of virtue  德之勇巧，四章
(See 1609 Sec. 5, part 1; part 2 is in Song 2)

 Qin-zither and se-zither's sound although elegant

Only can fill a grand hall,

Harmonize friends, extend until wall's outside, thus pleasure extends to neighboring people.

Not equal to virtuous action's sound's vast, (i.e., grandeur)

Which use four seas as boundary, eh?

Whole world cannot contain (it), so (it) even penetrates heaven's nine layers.

Floating sun - moon - stars, celestial bodies above,
(4. cont)

175

愉悦天神而致
pleasing heavenly spirits and gains

177

天主之宠乎！
the Heavenly Lord's esteem, ah!

179

勇哉，大德之成，
Valiant, ah, great virtue's being achieved,

181

能攻苍天之金钢石城，rit.
it can influence the azure heaven's gold hard rock city,

185

而息至威之怒矣。
and thus appease the Most Majestic's wrath, ah.

(188 interlude)

巧哉，德之大成，有闻於天，
Artful, ah! virtue's great achievement; having been heard in heaven,

192

能感无形之神明矣！
it can move without form's spiritually bright ones, ah!

(i.e. the formless) (i.e. heavenly hosts)
5. Regret old age without virtue

(See 1609 Sec. 7)

余春年渐退，有往无复。
My spring-years gradually have receded: there is going forward (but) no repeating.

(Cu) 老暗侵，莫我怒也。
Approaching old age as darkness invades, no one with me shares feelings ah.

He 为乎窄地而营广厦,
How to do it, eh: narrow land but have a glorious grand mansion.

以有数之日，图无数之谋赋?
(Or) /use having a/ number of days, plan no / number of schemes, hah?

Xing 获今日一日，即亟用之勿失。
Enjoy having this day by day, and so eagerly use them without fail.

吁！毋许明日，明日难保；
Alas! (One can) not depend on tomorrow, tomorrow is hard to guarantee;

来日之望，止欺愚乎？
Future day's hopes, (they) just cheat the foolish, right?
愚者盘日立於江涯，俟其固，
Foolish ones throughout the day stand by the river bank, waiting for it to dry up,

而江水汲汲流於海，终弗竭也。
But river waters tirelessly flow to the sea, ending not in exhaustion, yeah.

年也者，具有轡翼，莫怪其急飞也。
Years ah hah: they all have light wings, do not wonder at their speedy flight, ah.

吾不怪年之急飞也。
I do not wonder at the years' speedy flight, ah.

而惟悔吾之懈进。
just only regret my own procrastination.

已夫！老将臻其极端。
As las! As old age reaches its extreme

而德未成就矣。
then virtues no longer can be perfected, ah.
6. Spiritual equilibrium  胸中庸平，六章
(See 1609 Sec. 8) slower but steadily

Xiong zhong you bei zhe, chang heng hu jing yin.
Breast -within- having- completeness people, are often at ease with quiet solitude.

Bu yi rong zi yang yang, bu yi qiong zi yi yi yi yi.
not using prosperity / self flattery, not using poverty / self limitation, ah.

Rong shi ze han ju, er qiong ji you suo wang.
Prosperous times result in having fears, while poverty circumstances have their hopes.

Nai zhi shi zhi shi wu chang ye! An xin shou ming zhe gai ming wei yi ye.
So / know / world's condition / no constancy, ah! Calm-heart-endure-fate people change / fate for virtue, ah.

Hai yue wei wei, shu ya hai jiao, meng feng gu zhi bo lang fa zhi, bu dong ye.
As for sea cliffs so lofty, trees by sea headlands fierce winds batter them waves chop at them, / not move, ah.

Yi yu wo ju geng dang yang, wu jing nei zhu.
/different from my floating on a log in vast waves, having no really inner balance,

Di wai zhi piao liu, shi cong er.
and so in the external’s drifting currents, spend the time following along, that's all.
(6. cont)

298

造物者造我乎宇宙内，为万物流尊。
The Create-things-one (i.e., The Creator) created me in the world - all of creatures the most honorable,

301

而我屈己於林总，为其实僕也。
but I submit myself to the great collection of all, becoming its servant, ah.

(See 1609 Sec. 9)

309

惨兮惨兮，孰有抱德勇智者，
Misery, ah! Misery, ah! Who of the embrace-virtue's-strength-and-knowledge people,

313

能不待物棄己，而己先棄之，
can avoid dependence / things, on forgetting themselves, and themselves first forgotten this, (i.e., having now forgotten about themselves.)

318

斯拔於其上乎？
then promote others to their top, (i.e., above themselves)

323

曰：吾赤身且來，赤身且去。
Say: My naked body not only comes, the naked body also goes,

328

惟德殉我身之後也，他物誰可之共賤！
It is virtue / buried / my body 'sremnants, yeah, other things who could / them / together, hey!
7. Shouldering two sacks 肩負雙囊，七章

Fu ren ye, shi ji ye nan hu? Si ji ye yi hu?
(For) whatever person, ah, understanding oneself: difficult isn't it? Deceiving oneself: easy, isn't it?

Xi you yan: fan ren jian fu shuang nang,
Formerly there was a saying: whenever people on their shoulders carry a pair of sacks,

Yi xiong nang nang ren fei, yi bei nang nang ji te xi.
(they) use the chest's sack to carry other's faults, use the back's sack to carry their own evils, ah.

Mu fu xia yi jian ta e;
With eyes bowed down it is easy to see other's wickedness;

Hui shou, gu hou nang,
(but having to) turn the head to look at the back's sack,

Er jue zi chou zhe xi xi.
they thus think their own shameful acts are insignificant, ah.

Guan ta duan nai long jing, shi ji shi ji gu mu xi.
Look at another's shortcomings, so use dragon's eyes, see one's own flaws, so have blind eyes, ah.
Mo ni shi yi ri lan ci hui ren.
(Parmenides)
(5th c. BCE Greek philosopher)

Huo yue: Ru du wu jiu hu? Yi si mei wu chai yu?
(Someone said: You alone are without defect, eh?
Or thinking of muffling me & others, huh?)

Yue: you zai? Huo you zhong xi, wei jin wu qie zi you xi?
(And) said: There, is it? Perhaps / also important, ah, only now I also myself forgive, ah!

Jue jie! Dai ji ru shi kuan ye, cheng an yi! Ru you ji, ren ze he you zhi?
(Alas! Alas! Treating oneself thus so leniently, ah, certainly! / ah! / you forgive, / others thus why not forgive you?
is short-sighted, If yourself)

Yu zhi nyue fa, ren yi yi ci sheng wo yi.
(The) I determine harsh rules, others also use these to restrain me, ah.

Shi gua wu guo zhe, guo zhe xian nai xian er.
(Society rarely has no transgressors, transgressors clever as / goodself, ah.

Ru wang ren shu ru da yong, er ke bu shu bi xiao ci hu?
(You expect others to forgive your big warts, / can avoid forgiving their small flaws, hey? / while (you)
8. Death reaches everywhere  定命四達，八章

(See 1609 Sec. 11: harmonics)

Ming hu! shi zhi mang mang, liu nian su zhe, bi sheng ren ye.
A las! world's busy, busy, flowing years quickly end, pressuring people, ah.

(See 1609 Sec. 12)

You may well be talented, yet the talent does not avoid skin wrinkling, nor prevent hair (going) white.

When

/ feeble old age is attained, quickly it beckons to the ominous, / night brings Hades to your eyes, ah.

(This) directions, i.e., everywhere

repeat phrase a tempo

without exception (and the)

(So of) what use (is) toiling (and) toilingso as to avoid summer's ferocious heat?
8. cont

(See 1609 Sec. 13)

(Within) not (many) days then must be your forever - departure / wife (and) daughters, relatives (and) friends.

(From your)

slow and free

Even if (you) have a remote dwelling, (with) new gold bright (and) cheerful,

more rhythmic

(But your) garden yard's hundred trees, except for the pines and catalpas,

more freely

all, do not survive the master's death, ah. Day after day (you) toil, gathering money & grain.

very free and slow

(These) later people / enjoy, wasting / extravagantly all at once, / thus scattering /, ah!

(Can repeat lyrics of last line)