

Excerpt from Sima Qian's Letter to Ren An

摘自司马迁给任安的信

My father had no great deeds that entitled him to receive territories or privileges from the emperor. He dealt with affairs of astronomy and the calendar, which are close to divination and the worship of the spirits. He was kept for the sport and amusement of the emperor, treated the same as the musicians and jesters, and made light of by the vulgar men of his day.

我的父亲没有什么伟大的事迹使他有资格从皇帝那里获得领土或特权。他掌管天文和历法事务，这些事务与占卜和神灵崇拜很接近。和乐官以及弄臣一样，他被留作皇帝的娱乐之用，并被世俗所轻视。

If I fell before the law and were executed, it would make no more difference to most people than one hair off nine oxen, for I was nothing but a mere ant to them. The world would not rank me among those men who were able to die for their ideals, but would believe simply that my wisdom was exhausted and my crime great, that I had been unable to escape penalty and in the end had gone to my death. Why? Because all my past actions had brought this on me, they would say.

如果我伏法被杀，那就好像九牛的身上失掉一根毛，只不过是一只蝼蚁而已。世人不会把我归入为理想而死的人之列，而只会相信我的智慧已尽，罪孽深重，无法逃脱惩罚，最终走向了死亡罢了。为什么会这样？他们会说，因为我过去的所有行为都给我带来了这一切。

A man has only one death. That death may be as weighty as Mount Tai, or it may be as light as a goose feather. It all depends upon the way he uses it. ...

每个人都有一死，或许重如泰山，也或许轻如鸿毛。这取决于他用死追求的目的不同。

It is the nature of every man, to love life and hate death, to think of his relatives and look after his wife and children. Only when a man is moved by higher principles is this not so. Then there are things that he must do.

爱生恶死，挂念父母，爱护妻儿，这是每个人的天性。只有当一个人激愤于更高的公理正义时，情况才会有所改变。有一些事情是他必须做的。

The brave man does not always die for honor, while even the coward may fulfill his duty. Each takes a different way to exert himself. Though I might be weak and cowardly and

seek shamefully to prolong my life, yet I know full well the difference between what ought to be followed and what rejected.

勇敢的人不一定要为名节而死，懦弱的人如果仰慕大义，那随时随地都可勉励自己。我虽然怯懦软弱，想苟活于人世，但我很清楚弃生就死的界限。

How could I bring myself to sink into the shame of ropes and bonds?

我怎么能自甘沉溺于牢狱生活而忍受屈辱呢？

If even the lowest slave and scullery maid can bear to commit suicide, why should not one like myself be able to do what has to be done?

即使是最低等的奴隶和婢妾都能下决心自杀，为什么像我这样的人就不能去寻死呢？

But the reason I have not refused to bear these ills and have continued to live, dwelling among this filth, is that I grieve that I have things in my heart that I have not been able to express fully, and I am shamed to think that after I am gone my writings will not be known to posterity.

我之所以忍受着屈辱苟活下来，继续生活在这污秽之中，是因为遗憾于内心的志愿还没有达到，我会羞于在我去世后，我的著作将不会被后人所知。

Too numerous to record are the men of ancient times who were rich and noble and whose names have yet vanished away. It is only those who were masterful and sure, the truly extraordinary men, who are still remembered.

古代富贵而名字至今已消失的人，不胜枚举。只有那些卓异而非凡的人，才会被人们铭记。

- When the Earl of the West was imprisoned at Youli, he expanded the Changes;
- 当西伯侯姬昌被囚禁在羑里，他扩写了《周易》；
- Confucius was in distress and he made the Spring and Autumn Annals;
- 孔子受困窘而作《春秋》；

- Qu Yuan was banished and he composed his poem “Encountering Sorrow”;
- 屈原被流放，才写了《离骚》；
- After Zuo Qiu lost his sight, he composed the Narratives of the States;
- 左丘明双目失明后，才有《国语》。
- When Sunzi had had his feet amputated he set forth the Art of War;
- 孙臆被截去膝盖骨，写了《兵法》； “
- Lü Buwei was banished to Shu but his Lülan (Lüshi chunqiu) has been handed down through the ages;
- 吕不韦被贬谪到蜀地，后世才流传着他的《吕氏春秋》；
- While Han Feizi was held prisoner in Qin he wrote “The Difficulties of Disputation” and “The Sorrow of Standing Alone”;
- 当韩非子被囚禁在秦国的时候，写出了《说难》和《孤愤》；
- Most of the three hundred poems of the Book of Odes were written when the sages poured forth their anger and dissatisfaction.
- 《诗》三百篇大都是先贤们抒发愤慨而写的。

All these men had a rankling in their hearts, for they were not able to accomplish what they wished.

所有这些人因为没能实现自己的愿望，心中有郁结，

Therefore, they wrote of past affairs in order to pass on their thoughts to future generations. ... I too have ventured not to be modest but have entrusted myself to my useless writings.

他们写下了过去的事情，让将来的人了解他们的志向…我私下里也不自量力，用我那不高明的文辞，

I have gathered up and brought together the old traditions of the world that were scattered and lost. I have examined the deeds and events of the past and investigated the principles behind their success and failure, their rise and decay, in 130 chapters.

收集天下散失的历史传闻，综述事实的本末，考订其真实性，探究其中成败盛衰的道理，成文 130 篇。

I wished to examine into all that concerns Heaven and the human, to penetrate the changes of the past and present, completing all as the work of one family. But before I had finished my rough manuscript, I met with this calamity.

欲察天人之事，洞察古今之变，完成一家之论。但在我草创还未成书之时，我就遭遇了这场灾祸。

It is because I regretted that it had not been completed that I submitted to the extreme penalty without rancor. When I have truly completed this work, I shall deposit it in some safe place. If it may be handed down to men who will appreciate it and penetrate to the villages and great cities, then, though I should suffer a thousand mutilations, what regret would I have?

我痛惜这部书不能完成，所以受到最残酷的刑罚也没有怨恨。当我真的完成这项工作后，我将把它存放在一个安全的地方。如果它能传给志同道合的人，再让它广传于天下。那么，即时受再多的侮辱，我又会有什么后悔呢？

http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/cup/sima_qian_letter.pdf

Above are the words written by Sima Qian to explain his work.

以上是司马迁为解释其著作所写的文字。