

English Oral Presentation

Respected Venerable Sheng Miao and my dear teacher, a very good morning to you all. Today I would like to share a sentence of the original text of "The Doctrine of the Mean". The content of the report is mainly divided into three paragraphs, which are the preface and the original text, the explanation of the master Xu Xingmin, and personal insights.

Firstly, the sentence that I want to explain is from The Doctrine of the Mean. The original text is as follows: *The Master said "People all say, 'We are wise'; but being driven forward and taken in a net, a trap, or a pitfall, they know not how to escape. People all say, 'We are wise'; but happening to choose the course of the Mean, they are not able to keep it for a round month."*¹ 子曰：「人皆曰『予知』，驅而納諸罟獲陷阱之中，而莫之知辟也。人皆曰『予知』，擇乎中庸，而不能期月守也。」 Today, I chose this sentence as the main content of the lecture, hoping to reflect on ourselves through learning, to avoid being deceived by our so-called "smartness and wisdom", and to be able to more clearly and understand how we practice in life and improve ourselves.

Regarding this sentence, Master Xu said in his "The Doctrine of the Mean": *The Master said "People all say, 'We are wise'; but being driven forward and taken*

¹ James Legge: The Chinese Classics I-Confucian Analects·The Great Learning·The Doctrine of The Mean(Shanghai: HuaDong Shifan University Chubanshe, 2011), p.388.

in a net, a trap, or a pitfall, they know not how to escape."²子曰：「人皆曰『予知』，驅而納諸罟獲陷阱之中，而莫之知辟也。」 From this sentence we can know that these people are not smart and they cannot avoid traps. This trap was originally meant to be a tool for catching wild beasts. The traps here are used by people to catch wild animals in life. People dig a hole in the ground, then disguise the trap with some items, and then place the food that the beast likes to eat, to lure the beast to eat that thing, and finally trap the beast in the trap.

Different words here have different metaphors. The beast represents the people, the good food represents the coveted goods, and the trap represents the impending danger. This sentence refers to a person who seems to be very wise, but still loses his reason in the face of desire and greed, and eventually falls into a trap and cannot escape.

The next sentence is that *"People all say, 'We are wise'; but happening to choose the course of the Mean, they are not able to keep it for a round month."*³ 子曰：「人皆曰『予知』，擇乎中庸，而不能期月守也。」 What this sentence is trying to convey is that although a person claims to be smart, in fact they are not. For ordinary people, they think they can implement the course of the Mean, but in fact, this is just his personal idea. Although he can do it, he cannot persist for a long time or even a month.

They are not like Yan Hui, a disciple of Confucius. *"Such as Hui, for three*

² James Legge: The Chinese Classics I-Confucian Analects·The Great Learning·The Doctrine of The Mean(Shanghai: HuaDong Shifan University Chubanshe, 2011), p.388.

³ James Legge: The Chinese Classics I-Confucian Analects·The Great Learning·The Doctrine of The Mean(Shanghai: HuaDong Shifan University Chubanshe, 2011), p.388.

months there would be nothing in his mind contrary to perfect virtue."⁴ 「回也，其心三月不違仁」 Ordinary people do not have such wisdom and ability, they can not achieve this level, but they still think they are very smart. Confucius did not directly debate this situation, but used the relationship between animals and traps to describe the phenomenon.

Having said that, there were many such people in ancient times, and they are still the same now. For example, if some people become high-ranking officials or become rich, they are very likely to be lured by other interests to break the law and end up in prison, where they cannot escape. Master Xu also said at the end that even if we practice the course of the Mean on weekdays, it is very common that we cannot persist for a long time or even a month; therefore, it is very difficult to truly implement the course of the Mean!

The above is the content of Master Xu's explanation, followed by personal insights:

For the first half of this sentence, *The Master said "People all say, 'We are wise'; but being driven forward and taken in a net, a trap, or a pitfall, they know not how to escape.*"⁵ 子曰：「人皆曰『予知』，驅而納諸罟獲陷阱之中，而莫之知辟也。」 I also feel deeply. After studying history, I did see that many people think they are very smart, and they go to great lengths to seize power and harm others, thinking that they will benefit from it, but in the end, they actually suffer. There is a very classic allusion in history: 請君入甕.⁶ This incident

⁴ Edward Slingerland, *Confucius Analects*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003).p.55.

⁵ James Legge: *The Chinese Classics I-Confucian Analects·The Great Learning·The Doctrine of The Mean*(Shanghai: HuaDong Shifan University Chubanshe, 2011), p.388.

⁶ Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, *XinTangShu* 《新唐書》 < <http://www.guoxue123.com/shibu/0101/00xts/221.htm> > [Accessed 26 May 2022].

happened in the Tang Dynasty, when Empress Wu Zetian, in order to suppress those who opposed her, appointed a group of cruel officials. Two of them are the most vicious, one is Zhou Xing and the other is Lai Junchen. They have murdered many people by means of frame-ups and accusations and brutal criminal laws. Once, someone informed the Empress that Zhou Xing was going to rebel. The Empress asked Lai Junchen to investigate this matter. Lai Junchen prepared a sumptuous banquet and invited Zhou Xing to his home to drink and chat together. After a while, Lai Junchen sighed and said, "I handle cases on weekdays, and I often encounter some prisoners who refuse to admit their guilt. I wonder if you have a good solution?" Zhou Xing said proudly: "It is easy! You find a big pot and let the prisoner go into the pot to bake him, and if this is the case, what prisoner will not confess?" Then Lai Junchen ordered someone to bring a pot, heat it with the fire, and said to Zhou Xing, "Someone sue you for treason, the boss ordered me to investigate you. I am sorry, but please get in now." When Zhou Xing heard this, he fell to his knees in fright, kowtowed repeatedly and admitted his guilt. Zhou Xing thought he was smart and he only wanted to harm others, but he was indeed faced with such a trap and could not escape, which was also very pitiful. We may see others as pitiful, but in fact we are also like this! Just as Master Xu said, we have not fallen into the trap just because we have not had the opportunity yet, and we do not have the right to magnify our flaws. Once the opportunity comes, if we are not careful, we may fall into the trap unknowingly.

If we want to stick to choose the course of the Mean and not betray it, it is really difficult for us to do. If we observe our words and deeds, we will find that in the process of practice, and we will be affected by various habits or external environment. The last sentence of the original text describes, *"People all say, 'We are wise'; but happening to choose the course of the Mean, they are not able to*

keep it for a round month." ⁷ 「人皆曰『予知』，擇乎中庸，而不能期月守也。」 My feelings about this sentence are also very profound. Because I make mistakes like this all the time. For example, after just sticking to the teachings of the scriptures for a few days, I felt that I had made progress and improved, and I was happy. This thing is really good, and others have praised it. The admiration of others is an encouragement for me and a driving force for others to make progress, but at this time, there will be unnecessary thoughts in my heart. While I am happy, I also have small thoughts: I have done a good job these days! Even though this is a simple sentence, the fact is that I have started to become arrogant. Compared with the achievements of the ancient sages and masters, I am not even one point, and I do not know how much of my habit and delusions have not been eliminated. A little bit of achievement in the past can affect me. If I do not pay attention a little, I do not know when I will be blinded by my own ignorance, and I will take the lost road step by step unconsciously, and then I will go against the morals and make mistakes. I have to be careful! At this moment, the sage looks at me, as the scriptures say, as if he is wise, but in fact, he still could not keep the course of the Mean. I am just a common man, and there is still a long way to go!

That is all for my presentation today. Thank you for your listening.

⁷ James Legge: The Chinese Classics I-Confucian Analects·The Great Learning·The Doctrine of The Mean(Shanghai: HuaDong Shifan University Chubanshe, 2011), p.388.

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