



Undergraduate assignment feedback form

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Student Name: Zhuang Peilin (莊沛霖)	
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The Self cultivation of watchful over ourselves

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Respected provost and my dear teacher, hello everyone, today I would like to discuss the topic, 'The Self cultivation of watchful over ourselves'. This is my outline,

1. Definition of classical text

2. Two examples of sincerity

3. Conclusion

Definition of classical text

The Doctrine of Mean in the Book of Rites stated that, the path may not be left for an instant. If it could be left, it would not be the path. On this account, the exemplary man does not wait till sees things, to be cautious, nor till he hears things, to be apprehensive. there is nothing more visible than what is secret, and nothing more manifest than what is minute. therefore the exemplary man is watchful over themselves, when they are alone.¹

This classical text was written by Zi Si, the grandson of Confucius. It is about self-cultivation when there's only one person. The core of this cultivation is not to deceive ourselves. Indeed, this is a very high state in Confucian. When ordinary people face their own desire or external temptation, they will find many excuses for themselves and forget sage teachings. Meanwhile, many people care about their reputation and what they look like in the eyes of others. In public, they will show their good side, which makes them look like a gentleman. However, when there is no others, they show an ugly side. So this is a virtue that is not easy to achieve. It takes constant practice to be the same outside and inside.

I compared the different interpretations of this classical text by two famous scholars in history. Zheng Xuan of Han Dynasty think that the Chinese character Dao,

¹ Zi Si, *The Doctrine of Mean* (East China Normal University Press, 2011) p.384.

it means road, the way people usually walk, and it is like a navigation, a way forward. We cannot leave this road in a moment, because we act and talk according to this law. Ordinary people usually lose their way, so they can do anything when they are alone without any scruples. The exemplary man's practice is contrary to that of ordinary people. They are worried about their inner laziness and retreat, they are also worried that they will violate the Dao that everyone should abide by. Including teachers, classmates, family members and all the people around us help us to practice. Because when accompanied by them, we usually pay great attention to regulating our words and deeds. But the real cultivation still depends on ourselves, whether others are watching us or not. Exemplary men are watchful over themselves and they are the same at all times, whether or not someone is looking at them.

The cultivation of exemplary man is really for their own sake, but the cultivation of ordinary people may be for the sake of others to see and gain others' appreciation. There is no practical significance in such cultivation that do something for other's appreciation, it is not true. It's like when an actor makes a movie, the plot is made up and the characters do not exist, the actors just show it to everyone. At the end of the show, or when no one was watching, they would take off his disguise and become his old self. Therefore, only where no one sees is the place to witness a person's morality.

Many managers grasp this point and install cameras in their work places to supervise people in this way. On the road of self-cultivation, the most important thing is not to deceive ourselves. Correcting mistakes is for our real progress, rather than for the praise of others. No matter where an exemplary man is, no matter whether anyone looks at them or not, they can keep it all the time.

Zhu Xi in Song Dynasty believes that all things in the world have their reason for existence, and all things are the manifestation of natural reason. Dao is just like our nature. It already exists. Everything is the embodiment of Dao. Therefore, leaving the Dao as the basis for the existence of all things, without the existence of the Dao, all things will disappear. So Dao can't leave, even for a moment. At the same time, Dao is internal, not external. Dao is not a thing. I can throw away material things, but I can't throw away the Dao. Therefore, the attitude of exemplary man towards Dao is very

respectful and careful, Its existence is of great significance. Although the Dao cannot be seen with the eyes, heard with the ears, touched with the hands, it is not an object, but we can feel the existence of the Dao. Each of our actions is the expression of the existence of Dao, because the existence of Dao has the existence of all things.

Zhu Xi believes that exemplary mans are not only careful about their words and deeds where others cannot see them, but also pay great attention to their ideas. Because all things have a source, people will have an idea before saying something or doing something. In the process of self-cultivation, an exemplary man pay great attention to their thoughts, eliminates bad thoughts and retains good thoughts. If people have no bad thoughts, they will not do bad things. Things are often very small at the beginning. If they can be found and handled in time, they will not cause great losses. The sooner they are handled, the better. By practicing mentally and demanding ourselves with higher requirements, we can avoid bad things. This is the wisdom of sages.

Zheng Xuan's explanation is based on his understanding of traditional Chinese etiquette. He explains the meaning of this classical text from an external aspect and a practice. He believes that an exemplary man should look like this. Zhu Xi's explanation is more in-depth. Any practice is to make our heart more peaceful and pure. He grasped a key point, because with a pure heart, everything he did would not go wrong. For their bad ideas, desires can be stopped in time, so that positive ideas continue to grow. His explanation is of great help to scholars who implement traditional culture.

Two examples of sincerity

Miss Lin shared the story of Bobby Jones. He was a great golfer and won the championship in many international events. In 1930, he achieved a super grand slam. In the final of the 1925 us open, when playing the eleventh hole, because the grass was very dense, his club touched the grass, causing the ball to move a little bit. At that time, all the audience, including the referee, did not see this scene. He took the initiative to report to the referee that he had just committed a foul. The final score was

77 instead of 76. It was because of this stroke that he lost the game. Honesty is a character like gold. Don't lie because others can't see it. He can stick to his principles of life, face his mistakes and bear his responsibilities. To be honest, I was shocked by this story. In 2008, I was nine years old. I went to Shanghai thousands of kilometers away from my hometown to participate in a selection. At that time, I aimed to become a professional Table Tennis player. I can better understand the fierce and cruel competition in competitive sports. I practiced day and night, sweating and weeping in order to win. On the stage of the final, he was only one step away from the champion. I really admire such a player. His spirit must be immortal. Such a runner up is more valuable and meaningful than the champion won by improper means. The teachings of sages are like truth, both in East and West.

After hearing the story of Bobby Jones, I remembered another negative example, Maradona. His reputation is even louder, and the honors of his life are countless. In the semi-final of the 1986 World Cup, he led Argentina against England. In an attack, he chose to push the ball into the goal with his hand. Compared with the British, he was litter and his movements were very hidden. The three referees didn't see it and he didn't admit it. The British players asked the referee to explain the situation, which was of no use. The referee still thought the goal was valid. With this goal, Argentina beat England and won the world cup. It was not until 2002 that he admitted that the goal was a handball. Although he was a very famous and shining star, he was the absolute core of a team. He won numerous awards in his life and was rated as the greatest star of the 20th century. But I prefer Bobby Jones to Maradona. A person's character is the most important. People's love for a player will first ensure his integrity, which is more dazzling than his skills and noble character. It is the same in any country and in any field.

Conclusion

In conclusion, honesty is the foundation of a person, and all talents and skills are the branches and leaves. It is so important to ordinary people, not to mention us who want to be sages. When there is no one to manage and restrict our behavior, the bad idea of

restricting ourselves is honesty, but also for ourselves, and practice is also for ourselves.

Bibliography

Books (Chinese)

Zi Si 子思, *The Doctrine of Mean* 中庸 (East China Normal University Press, 2011)