

Provisional mark:

NB. *All marks are provisional until confirmed by the final examination board.*

Do What Is Proper for Your Situation

Word Count:1542

Respected provost, Miss Deng and everybody, good morning. My name is Liu Siyu. Today I am very happy to present you the theme of report that ‘Do What Is Proper for Your Situation’. A sentence in *The Doctrine of the Mean*, said that, people should not be motivated by external gain to pursue the status enjoyed by others; rather, they should be content with their own life and tap their full potential given the situation in which they find themselves.¹

Today I will explain the content is divided into four parts. I shall first explain my ‘Motivation’ to choose this sentence. Then I am going to introduce the ‘Meaning’ of the sentence. Next, I want to share my ‘Self-Reflection’. And finally, I will draw a ‘Conclusion’.

Motivation

I choose this sentence because I have encountered some troubles in my study recently. When I worked hard, but did not get my ideal results, I feel very confused. Several friends have guided me, and they cite this sentence, Men of virtue do what is proper to their position and circumstances they are in.² Therefore, I hope to study the sentence more deeply to help me understand the real meaning, as a student do my best the moment.

Now, I want to introduce the meaning of the sentence.

Meaning

In Chinese, it said: Jun Zi Su Qi Wei Er Xing, Bu Yuan Hu Qi Wai. What is the meaning of ‘Wei’? ‘Wei’ means one’s position. That is to say, when we are a character, we should do what that character should do. For example, leaders and subordinates, fathers and children, and so on, everyone should do what they should do. So, if each of us can do what we should do well, we are practicing the doctrine of the mean. To accomplish our own mission, we must accomplish what we should do and do our duty well.

¹ Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu zhangjuji zhu* 四書章句集注, (Beijing, ZHONG HUA Book Company, 2020) p.24. Trans. from file:///C:/Users/admin/AppData/Local/Temp/Temp1_219007810108711113322_Do%20What%20Is%20Proper%20for%20Your%20Situation.zip/Turnitin_Originality_Report_155896964_highest_matches.html, 4 June 2021.

² Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu zhangjuji zhu* 四書章句集注, (Beijing, ZHONG HUA Book Company, 2020) p.24. Trans. from file:///C:/Users/admin/AppData/Local/Temp/Temp1_219007810108711113322_Do%20What%20Is%20Proper%20for%20Your%20Situation.zip/Turnitin_Originality_Report_155896964_highest_matches.html, 4 June 2021.

In China, the ancients summed up all interpersonal relationships into five ethical relationships: among parents and children, leaders and subordinates, husbands and wives, siblings, and friends, which were called “the Five Cardinal Relationships”. We should do our duty well in every place every time. If we do this in the five ethics, we just cultivate the doctrine of the mean, reach the highest level that what heaven has bestowed upon people is called human nature and get our own nature.

Jun Zi Su Qi Wei Er Xing , ‘Su’ means daily life. That is to say whether in the family or in the society, we should do what we should do every day when we activities with others. The other sentence is, Bu Yuan Hu Qi Wai. What is the meaning of ‘Wai’? It means “outside”, except for ourselves, such as others. This sentence teaches us not to ask for others and envy for the life beyond. The ‘Yuan’ means I wish. Sometimes, we expect ourselves to treat others well, and others should repay me in this way. Even treat the people in the family to ask the other party to be good to ourselves. This is called ‘Yuan Hu Qi Wai’.

As a gentleman, what we should pay attention to is to do our duty and do what we should do in that position. At home, for example, as a father, he loves his children. Similarly, as children, be filial to your parents and do not ask them to do anything to you. Parents do their duty, children just do their own good. This is what we call ‘Jun Zi Su Qi Wei Er Xing , Bu Yuan Hu Qi Wai.’ Therefore, in society, the same is true. We just do our duty well and treat others as a gentleman. Do not think about how others will repay ourselves. Do not have to have this wish.

Self-Reflection

The basic content of the above sentence, next is my reflection. People in different circumstances have different duties to perform and different rules to observe. They can give play to their innate morality by proper performance of their duties.³ As a student, especially now studying Chinese traditional culture and being influenced by ancient sages, I should understand why I want to study. In my opinion, when I come to the Academic of Sinology, I should not be motivated by external gain to pursue the status enjoyed by others; rather, I should be content with my own life and tap my full potential given the situation in which I find myself. Some time ago, it was precisely because of the requirements for performance, and even expectations for teachers, hoping that teachers can give me affirmation. So, when the results

³ Key Concepts in Chinese Thought And Cul Ture, file:///C:/Users/admin/AppData/Local/Temp/Temp1_219007810108711113322_Do%20What%20Is%20Proper%20for%20Your%20Situation.zip/Turnitin_Originality_Report_155896964_highest_matches.html , 4 June 2021.

are not as good as my objectives, it is easy to have resentment and incomprehension. This also corresponds to the sentence ‘ask for others and envy for the life beyond’. As a student, I should only study hard and finish my assignments by myself, instead of overemphasizing the final results. I should pay attention to my experience, understanding and harvest in the process.

Now I am back at home. I feel angry when I get along with people in society several times. I gradually find that I desire to control others. When other people's response does not meet their expectations, my heart will play a lot irritable mood. But in the past, I didn't know why I was upset when I was in bad mood, now I can see that. I once read a book called “*A Complaint Free World*”, which said: appreciation can motivate people to perform better, in order to get more listing; Criticism makes people wear and tear. When we belittle others, we are in fact acquiescing that person to remain the same in the future.⁴ In fact, when I complain about others, as the book says, my heart is already criticizing others' practices, and I am also acquiescing that this person will still do so in the future. If I can be good at myself and expand my mind, many things are my duty, and I do not ask others any more.

Before, I did not understand why the ancient sages not only could live in poverty but also could be rich and happy. Now I understand they could do their duty and cultivate the doctrine of the mean in the Five Cardinal Relationships. When they reach the extreme and reach the highest level, they will get their own nature. Thus, gentlemen and sages could be so happy, because they didn't have too much pursuit of external things in their heart, they were not tired by fame and wealth. As the last sentence of this paragraph says: Jun Zi Wu Ru Er Bu Zi De Yan. That is to say men of virtue can find contentment in whatever situation they may find themselves in.⁵

My father once asked me what kind of person I want to be, and I replied that I want to be gentlemen. Because at that time, I felt that I was not willing to be mediocre, but I felt that the sage was too far away, so the position of gentleman was not high or low. However, after learning slowly, I realized that it is not easy to be a gentleman. If you want to be a gentleman, you must do what you should do first. And what is a gentleman? Zilu who was Confucius's student also asked Confucius this question, and Confucius replied, “cultivate yourself to make

⁴ Will Bowen, *A Complaint Free World*,
http://yuedu.163.com/book_reader/7bac1f5dd03f41e8a11a02b1d119be63_4 , 4 June 2021.

⁵ Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu zhangjuji zhu* 四書章句集注 , (Beijing, ZHONG HUA Book Company, 2020) p.24.
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people feel stable”⁶, As a matter of fact, doing what you do is to cultivate yourself. Mencius also mentioned “to find out the cause or request from one's own side.”⁷ At the *Great Learning*, it also said that we need to cultivate ourselves in order to govern the country and the world.⁸ In the past six months of study, I have gradually seen my desire to control others, rather than find out the cause or request from my own side. At the same time, from the point of view of achievement, I still have a sense of arrogance to others. Therefore, I also expect myself to be able to practice for myself, and achieve the unity of knowledge and practice.

Conclusion

In a word, this sentence says that men of virtue do what is proper to their position and the circumstances they are in, without envying for the life beyond.⁹ At the same time, it is also the spirit of only asking for one's own and doing one's own duty well, which is often mentioned in Confucian classics. Only in our own position, do our own things, do not seek outside, in order to get real long-term happiness. I know the most important thing is to do. I will also expect to do my part well and be a qualified student.

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

⁶ Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu zhangjuji zhu* 四書章句集注, (Beijing, ZHONG HUA Book Company, 2020) p.160.

⁷ Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu zhangjuji zhu* 四書章句集注, (Beijing, ZHONG HUA Book Company, 2020) p.241.

⁸ Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu zhangjuji zhu* 四書章句集注, (Beijing, ZHONG HUA Book Company, 2020) p.3.

⁹ Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu zhangjuji zhu* 四書章句集注, (Beijing, ZHONG HUA Book Company, 2020) p.24.

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