



Undergraduate assignment feedback form
(to be completed by marker)

<i>Student Name:</i> Ruxin Zhang (張如心)	
<i>Module Code:</i> SICH5004 <i>Module title:</i> The Governing Principles of Ancient China: Selected Readings in the Book of Poetry and Book of History	<i>Student number:</i> 1903297
<i>For completion by marker:</i> <i>Comments:</i> 	
<i>Marker's signature:</i>	<i>Date:</i>
<i>Provisional mark:</i> NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the final examination board.	

A Study on How to Maintain a Respectful Attitude

Word Count: 1,951

Respected provost, Miss Deng, good evening. My name is Ruxin Zhang and the topic I would like to share with you today is how to maintain a respectful attitude.

The presentation will be divided into three parts. The first part is ‘Motivation’, the second part is ‘Analysis’. And finally, I will share with you ‘Self Thoughts’.

Motivation

Let’s start with the first part.

Today I want to share with you a poem called *Jing Zhi* 敬之, which comes from the *Sacrificial odes of Zhou* 周頌 of *The Book of Songs* 詩經. The poem is about the sincere advice by the ministers to *King Cheng of Zhou* 周成王, and the reminders and encouragement he gave himself. The original text is that ‘Be respectful, be respectful. Heaven is so bright and glorious, and its appointment is not easily preserved. Do not say that it is high aloft above us, It ascends and descends about our doings, It daily inspects us wherever we are. I am a younger generation to govern the country, I must listen respectfully. By daily progress and monthly advance, I will learn to hold fast the gleams of knowledge, till I arrive at bright intelligence. Therefore you shall assist me to bear the burden of my position, and show me how to display a virtuous conduct.’¹

The reason I chose the poem is that although I know that I should be cautious when I am alone, I still sometimes relax and forget to remind myself in my daily life.

¹ Original text: ‘敬之敬之，天維顯思，命不易哉。無曰高高在上，陟降厥士，日監在茲。維予小子，不聽敬止。日就月將，學有緝熙于光明。佛時仔肩，示我顯德行。’ Trans. by James Legge, and I made some changes. *The Chinese Classics* (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2011), p.598-599.

Especially when I am relaxing, it is hard for me to remind myself to be self-disciplined. So, I often regret wasting my time. However, through learning this poem, I understand how the ancients reminded and helped themselves. Therefore, I have done a little research about it.

Analysis

Now let's move on to the second part.

First of all, the first half of this poem is the sincere advice by the ministers to *King Cheng of Zhou*. The character *jing* 敬 means respectful, the character *xian* 顯 means bright and glorious, and the character *si* 思 is a tone word. The first sentence of this poem is the advice of the ministers to *King Cheng of Zhou*, they told the king that he should respect heaven. Now that the mandate of heaven has been transferred from *the Shang Dynasty* 商朝 to our *Zhou Dynasty* 周朝, it is not easy for us to establish this dynasty. You should love the common people as your own children and not repeat the mistakes of *the Shang Dynasty*. This sentence not only reminded the emperor to be grateful for the kindness of his ancestors, but also reminded him to learn from the previous dynasty. Then look at the following sentence, the character *zhi* 陟 means ascend, the character *jiang* 降 means descend. And the character *shi* 士 usually refers to the scholar-officials, but in this sentence it means things. This sentence means that do not think that heaven is high aloft above us. In fact, it is very close to us and it ascends and descends every day to inspect what we do.

The above two sentences are what the ministers advised *King Cheng of Zhou*, and these two sentences were also selected by *Wei Zheng* 魏徵 into *The Qunshu Zhiyao* 群書治要. The reason why *Wei Zheng* chose these two sentences was also to remind *Emperor Taizong of Tang dynasty* 唐太宗 to be cautious in his words and actions, knowing that heaven will monitor our every word and action at all times. Do not think

we can do whatever we want where others cannot see us. As the saying goes, there are gods at three feet above our heads who keep track of our good and bad actions at all times. It is also said in *The Taishang Ganyingpian* 太上感應篇 that there are spirits of justice in heaven who record people's faults and shorten the length of their lifespan according to the severity of the mistakes they make.² And in China, there is a custom of worshipping *the kitchen god* 灶神 before the Spring Festival every year. This is because, at this time of year, *the kitchen god* goes to heaven to report on the family's good and bad actions for the year. It is also recorded in *The Yujingyigong Yuzaoshenji* 俞淨意公遇灶神記 that during *the Ming Dynasty* 明朝, a devout scholar met *the kitchen god*. *The kitchen god* helped him to realise his bad habits. After that, he actively corrected these bad habits, and his fortune was changed completely. In addition, there are many similar records in history, which remind us to be careful about our words and actions.

Next, The second half of the poem is the self-reminder of *King Cheng of Zhou*. The word *xiaozhi* 小子 is what *King Cheng of Zhou* called himself. The character *cong* 聰 here does not mean wise, it means listening. And the character *zhi* 止 is a tone word. This sentence means that because heaven is always supervising my every word and action, I am a younger generation to govern the country, I must listen respectfully and treat my actions carefully. The next sentence contains an idiom, the idiom *Rijiu Yuejiang* 日就月將 means to achieve something every day, to make progress every week.³ The character *ji* 緝 means to continue, and the character *xi* 熙 means bright. This sentence means that I should make achievements every day and make progress every month, and I should keep learning to gradually approach the intelligent moral power. The last sentence shows the humble and respectful attitude of *King Cheng of Zhou* as a king. The character *fo* 佛 means to assist, and the word *zaijian* 仔肩 means shoulder, which can be extended to the meaning of responsibility. This sentence

² Original text: ‘是以天地有司過之神，依人所犯輕重，以奪人算。’ Yin Yuansheng 因緣生, *Shengxue genzhigen* 聖學根之根(Taipei: World Book Publishing Co. Ltd., 2015),book6, p.1.

³ Han Dian, <https://www.zdic.net/hans/%E6%97%A5%E5%B0%B1%E6%9C%88%E5%B0%86>, 12 Dec 2021.

means that I hope to get your help to assist me to govern the country and show me how to restore my original virtue.

Although this is a poem in the ritual of showing reverence to ancestors, ‘The emotion it expresses is not fanatical, but a rational emotional state.’⁴ ‘This is because, in *the Shang Dynasty* 商朝, people worshipped and trusted heaven unconditionally and believed that as long as they had the mandate of heaven, they could be fearless.’⁵ However, after the collapse of *the Shang Dynasty*, the people of *the Zhou Dynasty* realised that although the mandate of heaven existed, it would not be easy to keep it if they were not careful with their words and actions. Therefore, ‘The people of *the Zhou Dynasty* emphasised and attached importance to people's morality, and hoped to preserve the mandate of heaven.’⁶

Although this poem is not very long, it has a deep meaning. As for *The Qunshu Zhiyao*, *Wei Zheng* only selected the first half of the poem to remind the king to respect the mandate of heaven, but did not require him to be as cautious as *King Cheng of Zhou*. The purpose of *Wei Zheng's* doing this is to let the *Emperor Taizong of Tang dynasty* reflect himself. It can be seen from here that *Wei Zheng* not only tried his best to assist the *Emperor Taizong of Tang dynasty*, but also carefully reminded him of this.

Self Thoughts

Let's now move on to the last part.

Through studying this poem, if we limit its scope to between kings and ministers, the

⁴ Zhu Xiuquan 祝秀權, *Lun Shijingzhousong De Shidaitezheng* 論《詩經·周頌》的時代特征, *Literature and Art Criticism* 文藝評論, 2(2011), 48

⁵ Wang Kejia 王克家, *Zhousongjingzhi Yu Zhoulihexinjingshen degoucheng* 《周頌·敬之》與周禮核心精神的構成, *Literature and Art Criticism* 文藝評論, 4(2013), 38

⁶ Zhu Xiuquan 祝秀權, *Lun Shijingzhousong De Shidaitezheng* 論《詩經·周頌》的時代特征, *Literature and Art Criticism* 文藝評論, 2(2011), 47

wisdom we learn from it will be very limited. This poem seems very far away from us and has nothing to do with our current life. But in fact, if it can be combined with our real life, it still has valuable value. This is because this poem has actually told us three key points, and these three key points need to be treated with caution in our real life.

Specifically, the first key point is that we should cherish the good fortune left by our ancestors. Just as there are four seasons in a year, plants are sown in spring, then grow in summer, and finally harvested in autumn. It was through the efforts and the accumulation of virtue of *King Wen of Zhou* 周文王 and *King Wu of Zhou* 周武王 that *King Cheng of Zhou* was able to have a stable and steady regime. Similarly, each of our ancestors left us precious wealth. From the visible material conditions of life to the invisible family traditions, they have influenced us all the time. As for us, since we are now enjoying what our ancestors have left us, we should cherish it. *The Dizigui* 弟子規 said, ‘I will serve my departed parents as if they were still alive.’⁷ This saying does not mean that we only need to respect our ancestors during the ritual of showing reverence to ancestors. When we do everything in our daily life, we should think of the expectations of our ancestors. In fact, whenever we remember our loved ones who have passed away, our minds will naturally recall the encouragement and expectations they gave us. I believe that everyone who remembers these warm memories will naturally be careful about what they say and do without external requirements or reminders.

Further, not only what our relatives said to us, but also the poems in *the Book of Songs*, and the teachings of all sages and virtuous people, are worthy of our serious study, and we should always remind ourselves not to forget the love and care from our ancestors. If we cannot maintain this gratitude to our ancestors at all times, the second key point is that we must have reverence for the heavens. Just like people do not want

⁷ Original text: ‘事死者，如事生。’ Trans. by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, *Dizigui*, (Taipei: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 2015), p.56.

to break the law, because they know that crime will be punished by the law. However, when people are alone, they will feel that no one knows that they have done something wrong and they cannot be punished. But in reality, people who break the law will be found, and they live in fear every day. In that case, why not be cautious about our words and actions from the beginning and live each day in happiness and peace of mind?

The third and last key point is the attitude of accepting others' opinions with an open mind. In *The Great Learning* 大學, it is said that 'From the emperor to the citizens, cultivation of oneself is the foundation.'⁸ On the road of self-cultivation, it is essential to be reminded by others. In *The Analects of Confucius* 論語, it is said that 'The superior man on grounds of culture meets with his friends, and by friendship helps his virtue.'⁹ Although *King Cheng of Zhou* is a king, he still accepted the advice of others with an open mind. *The Dizigui* also said, 'If I am uneasy about compliments and appreciative of criticism, then sincere, understanding, and virtuous people will gradually come close to me.'¹⁰ A person who is willing to accept other people's opinions will be able to find his own problems faster and thus improve himself.

In conclusion, although this poem has only a few sentences, it contains three key points that are not only important to the dominator, but are also meaningful to modern people. From an emotional point of view, it reminds us to remember the kindness of our ancestors and their expectations of us. From the perspective of the mind, it reminds us to be cautious in words and actions. And when we return to real life, it reminds us to accept others' opinions with an open mind and help us improve quickly. It can be seen that there is a lot of wisdom in a poem that we can learn and put into

⁸ Zhu Xi 朱熹, *The Variorum of the Four Books* 四書章句集注(Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1983), p.4.

⁹ Cheng Shude 程樹德, *The Collected Commentaries of The Analects of Confucius* 論語集釋(Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1990), p.1133.

¹⁰ Original text: '聞譽恐，聞過欣。直諒士，漸相親。' Trans. by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, *Dizigui*, (Taipei: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 2015), p.43-44.

practice in our lives, and we cannot despise these valuable spiritual wealth.

This is my presentation, if there is any mistake in the content, any suggestions and advice would be appreciated, thank you very much.

Bibliography

Books (English)

Dizigui, (Taipei: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 2015)
James Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2011)

Books (Chinese)

Cheng Shude 程樹德, *The Collected Commentaries of The Analects of Confucius* 論語集釋(Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1990)
Yin Yuansheng 因緣生, *Shengxue genzhigen* 聖學根之根 (Taipei: World Book Publishing Co. Ltd., 2015)
Zhu Xi 朱熹, *The Variorum of the Four Books* 四書章句集注(Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1983)

Journal Articles (Chinese)

Wang Kejia 王克家, *Zhousongjingzhi Yu Zhoulhexinjingshen degoucheng* 《周頌·敬之》與周禮核心精神的構成, *Literature and Art Criticism* 文藝評論,4(2013), 38
Zhu Xiuquan 祝秀權, *Lun Shijingzhousong De Shidaitezheng* 論《詩經·周頌》的時代特征, *Literature and Art Criticism* 文藝評論,2(2011), 47

Websites (Chinese)

Han Dian,
<https://www.zdic.net/hans/%E6%97%A5%E5%B0%B1%E6%9C%88%E5%B0%86>, 12 Dec 2021.

