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The Introduction to Kong Yingda

Zihan Xu

Good morning, dear Professor. Good afternoon fellow students. Today, I would like to introduce one of the most important scholars in Chinese Classical Studies to you, whose name is Kong Yingda.

The presentation is divided into three parts: the introduction of Kong's life, his achievements and book, and his concept.

First part is the introduction to himself.

Kong Yingda was born in 574-648 during Sui Dynasty to Tang Dynasty. His family conditions are very good. Kong Yingda himself is the 32 generation of Confucius, and his grandfather was an imperial counsellor. He is very good at memory, it has been recorded that he could remember thousands of words every day, but his cleverness also makes others jealous. The emperor Yangguang had invited all the scholars who studied Confucius to an academic conference, and Kong Yingda was considered as the best one. He was only 32years old then which is an age way too young to be famous as for those who studied Confucius, and it makes other elder scholars felt shameful and hired assassins to kill him. Fortunately, he was protected by the Duke Chu. Later he was introduced

to Li Shimin which is as known as Emperor Taizong later, and became member of Prince Qin's eighteen scholars in Lingyange which means you were titled as the best scholars at that time.

The second part is the contribution Kong Yingda made, and what achievement he reached.

It is acknowledged that the biggest contribution he made might be the book named 五經正義 which was a masterpiece finished under his name. At that time, it was hard for the learners to study the classic books due to the countless mistake happened in transcribing the original script or commentary the former scholar wrote, and the result is those wrong version makes scholars confused and argued for the different version they hold oneself. The emperor Taizong need a standard textbook for official examination, so Kong Yingda and his team put effort to organize this great task.

They searched the lost version of the classics, collected different explanation from the north and south school and he ended the split situation of Confucianism, corrected wrong characters and sentences, and finally set up the refined version of the five classics which are the most important books in Confucianism.

So we could say that 五經正義 is a milestone in Chinese classic studies, because it is so important both on political and academic. As for

the history of Chinese classic study, it can be said that 五經正義 is the book who carry on the past and forge ahead, and this masterpiece was made by Kong Yingda.

We all know the contribution Kong Yingda made, now let us talk about his academic concept.

One of key feature of Kong's idea is to rebuild a main function of the Confucianism which had been lost for hundreds of years, and that function is the importance of practicing the morality that sages taught into the academic and daily lives. Like when he was annotating *the Book of Changes*, he concluded this book which was renowned as talking about mysterious thing that it was actually talking about existence (有) instead of the nonexistence(無) the scholars of Wei and Jin Dynasties emphasized. His idea was actually come from Wangbi 王弼, he think the main idea of *The Book of Changes* is talking about the function and practice, although Tao is 無, but 有 comes from 無(然有從無出, 理則包無). The difference is, Wangbi thinks that 無 is the highest idea and the base of the world, but Kong Yingda thinks that 無 was concluded in 有 which is the opposite of Wangbi's idea. From this we could easily see how Kong Yingda emphasized the 用 which means practice, and that is what Confucius and his disciples emphasized too. At that time, great men like Confucius or Mencius, they want to use their theory and philosophy to

help the society and stop the chaos that has been last for hundreds of years, so of course they would emphasis the function of use and practice, and that is what Kong Yingda thought too. During the Jin Dynasty, philosophers focused on talking about mysterious and abstract concept which mixed with religions and poetic ideas, but they are not useful for the society and country, and China was split into two even three countries, and the society system was collapsed just barely contained, so this could be a main reason that Kong want to rebuild the practical function that Confucius once built. It is also seen in other book he annotated, like in Liji Zhengyi 禮記正義, he said : ‘ Li is the 體 is the 履. Hold it inside of one’s heart is called 體, practicing what you hold is called 履(禮者，體也，履也。統之於心曰體，踐而行之曰履).

This is a very important feature of Kong Yingda if we want to understand this master, it is not only a concept he wrote, also appears in his book and influenced the development of Confucianism after him, and this influence extends to influence his own character. Himself was a very active and patriotic Confucianist, who participated the politic and making contribution to education for the aim of helping the society all his life. He was also the teacher of the eldest prince who would be the emperor after Taizong, and we could also see that he is a very brave and upright man, he never afraid to confront the prince even he could be killed. These points all shows his responsibility as a Confucian who wanted to practice

what he learned and help the society. Through his story, I could see how Kong Yindga loves his country and his culture, and more than a scholar, he acts more than he talk, and I think this could be called a real Confucianism, because Confucian's aim is also want to help people and the world. Through his story, I am also encouraged to be a Confucian learner like him, to practice what I learned, and that cultivate myself and use it to help others.