



Undergraduate assignment feedback form

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The importance of Shendu to morality

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Respected provost and my dear teachers, hello everyone, today I would like to discuss the topic ‘The importance of Shendu to morality’.

This is my outline:

- 1.Introduction
- 2.Exploration of Sentences
- 3.Control thoughts
4. Summary

Introduction

Shendu is a very important traditional thought in ancient China. It means that superior people can be watchful over their words and deeds when they are alone, so that their words and deeds meet the moral standards. No matter from the Confucian sages and exemplary man, or from the famous scholars of the past dynasties, they all attach great importance to it, because it plays an irreplaceable role in improving people's personal cultivation. I wish my moral cultivation could be improved rapidly, so I chose to explore the sentences about Shendu in *the Doctrines of the Means*.

Exploration of Sentences

The Doctrines of the Means stated that, ‘the moral law is a law from whose operation we cannot for one instant in our existence escape. A law from which we may escape is not the moral law. wherefore is is the moral man(君子) watches diligently over what his eyes cannot see and is in fear and awe of what his ears cannot hear.’¹ People need to be selfless in the process of self-cultivation, this is very difficult for ordinary people to do, because everyone is used to taking themselves as the center, and the starting point of their thinking is their own interests. People have the seven emotions

¹ Gu Hongming 辜鸿铭, *English translation classics by Gu Hongming 辜鴻銘英譯經典* (Publishing House of China 2017), p.83.

and the six desires, which is the obstacle to self-cultivation. So the saints will find ways to get rid of these difficulties. The exemplary man will be careful when they are alone, because this is the best time for self-cultivation. Generally speaking, ordinary people will have high demands on their behavior in public and make themselves more likely to behave like a gentleman, because they do not want to leave a bad impression on others. When they are alone, when others cannot see what they are doing, their inner desires may be displayed, such as laziness, people may be immersed in enjoyment and profligacy. This is not good for personal cultivation, so saints teach people to be cautious about being alone. Next sentence, *the Doctrines of the Means* stated, ‘Exemplary man is in fear and awe of what his ears cannot hear.’² When people do not communicate with others, they will have a lot of ideas. It is good for them to think about others. If they think about how to expand his own interests and act for his own interests, when they infringe on the interests of others, they are prone to conflict. Ordinary people may think that an idea is just an idea. If they do not take action, it does not matter. But the exemplary man who study the Doctrine of the Mean pays great attention to their own thoughts. On the road of self-cultivation, it is very important to keep a pure heart carefully. People can not be selfish and indulgent for their own desire. Of course, they cannot stop for a moment in the process. If we have bad ideas, we will be farther and farther away from the moral law. So here, the attitude of exemplary man towards his own thoughts is caution and fear. And then, *the Doctrine of the Mean* stated, ‘there is nothing more evident than what cannot be seen by the eyes and nothing more palpable than what cannot be perceived by the senses. Wherefore the moral man watches diligently over his secret thoughts.’³ This is because people will feel that in such a subtle place, small places, others can not find, which lead people easy to lose their vigilance, so it is easy to be found.

Control thoughts

In a sense, having thoughts is equivalent to giving actions. For example, in modern

² Gu Hongming 辜鸿铭, *English translation classics by Gu Hongming* 辜鴻銘英譯經典, p.83.

³ Gu Hongming 辜鸿铭, *English translation classics by Gu Hongming* 辜鴻銘英譯經典, p.83.

technology products, the remote control and mouse give instructions to the TV and computer, and then the TV and computer will be operated. Our mind is like such a remote control, as long as we have an idea, it is like sending out a signal. Therefore, it is the same to have a mind and to have put it into practice. From the perspective of law, crime can be divided into accomplished crime and attempted crime. To rob a bank, if someone succeeds in robbing a lot of money, this situation is belong in to accomplished crime. If someone encounter some accidents and do not get the money, it belongs to attempted crime. As long as they put their ideas into practice, it is a violation. When people have improper ideas, the police will not manage them. People who focus on self-cultivation will manage their own ideas. The law would not limit people's thoughts, and the police do not arrest people with bad thoughts. The reason why exemplary man is particularly careful with ideas is that the energy generated by ideas is huge. Both good and evil actions begin with the first idea, so they demand themselves with higher standards than the average. People who focus on self-cultivation will manage their ideas well and they will not do anything against morality in a state of freedom and without supervision. Cai Yuanding, an educator of the Song Dynasty, taught his disciples that when a person walks, he should be worthy of his own shadow. This means that when they walks, they should concentrate on walking and should not have any bad ideas or look around. At the same time, when people sleep, they should not do something bad and feel guilty about the things around you. It is not allowed to have bad ideas in dreams. If you indulge a little, you should find out and correct it immediately. Do not need others to see to remind us, we must immediately correct. From self-cultivation, people's mind should be more and more pure, many times they can be very clear to see their thoughts. Bad ideas should be eliminated. Reading classics every day, we should also use this to measure myself. Therefore, we should not wait for our own shortcomings to be regretted after making mistakes, nor should we wait for others to point them out. We should prevent the occurrence of mistakes from the root. During the Eastern Han Dynasty, Yang Zhen had a high personal accomplishment and was recommended as the governor of Donglai. On his way to Donglai, he passed by city Chang. Wang MI, the county

magistrate of Changyi, wanted to thank him because he had been recommended by Yang Zhen. In the evening, Wang Mi took eleven pounds of gold to Yang Zhen, but Yang Zhen did not accept it and said, 'I know your talent, so I recommend you to be an official, but you do not know me.' Wang Mi said, 'no one knows about this evening. You'd better take the gold.' Yang Zhen said, 'heaven knows, earth knows, you know, I know, how would you say that no one knows.' Yang Zhen's self-cultivation is very good. It is a noble virtue to resist the temptation of money. He also thinks that the heaven knows what he does, which shows that he has a heart of awe for the world. No matter what he does, he will be aboveboard and will not do things for his own selfish desire.

Conclusion

Self-cultivation needs to reflect and analyze one's thoughts, words and behaviors at any time and any place, which requires the determination and courage to achieve the sublimation of moral cultivation. Shendu is also to let people be consistent, whether in public or alone. It is not easy for ordinary people to control their own thoughts, but it is the only way for them to become sages and sages. It is hard at the beginning of the past, and it is not easy to manage their own thoughts at the beginning. However, if we persist for a period of time, we will find that our heart becomes purer than before, and bad thoughts will rise less and less, and it is easier to eliminate evil thoughts.

Bibliography

Books (English)

Gu Hongming 辜鴻銘, *English translation classics by Gu Hongming* 辜鴻銘英譯經

典 (Publishing House of China, 2017).