



Trinity Saint David

<i>Student Name:</i> Estienne Ren	
<i>Module Code:</i> SICH4004 <i>Module title:</i> An Introduction to the Great Learning and the Doctrines of the Means	<i>Student number:</i> 206032
<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.	

The process of illustrious virtue

I- Introduction

The subject of my presentation today is the first chapter of *The Great Learning*, which is translated by James Legge as “The point where to rest being known, the object of pursuit is then determined, and, that being determined, a calm unperturbedness may be attained to. To that calmness, there will succeed a tranquil repose. In that repose, there may be careful deliberation, and that deliberation will be followed by the attainment of the desired end.”¹ Before these sentences it first mentioned “what the Great Learning teaches, is to illustrate illustrious virtue and to renovate the people”², this explains that we need to make efforts for the Great Learning teaches, but what is the method of learning it? The method is the chapter we’ve just mentioned which is the subject of my talk.

Usually, we say the order is: be determined, calmness, tranquil repose, careful deliberation, attainment of the desired, but we have ignored another important sentence just before which is “the point where to rest being known”³.

II- Interpretation of the chapter

Let’s see the chart made by M. Xu Xing Min. On this chart it says that we can’t try to advance by skipping necessary steps, so what does it mean exactly? What does the character *lie* (躐) refer to? It means to skip over the normal steps. For instance, when taking the stairs in a building, we first need to climb the first floor to get to the second, then climb the second one to reach the third, etc. We can’t skip any floor if you want to go to the next one. So for the order to be determined, calmness, tranquil repose, careful deliberation, and attainment of the desired, there is no way to skip the second and go straight to the third, and this is called *feike leijin* (非可躐進).

¹ James Legge, *The Chinese Classics Vol. 1* (Taipei: SMC Publishing INC., 2016), p. 356-357.

² James Legge, *The Chinese Classics Vol. 1* (Taipei: SMC Publishing INC., 2016), p. 356.

³ James Legge, *The Chinese Classics Vol. 1* (Taipei: SMC Publishing INC., 2016), p. 356.

The first step is to know the point where to rest, and then the others go after, so it is developed step by step. Let's see now characters one by one:

First of all, M. Xu said the character *zhi* (止) means *nianzi zaizi* (念茲在茲), and the character *zi* (茲) signifies "this". So, what does *nianzi zaizi* indicate? *Nianzi* signifies "think about this", when thinking about this thing, thinking about this situation, our heart must be on this. If we look at the character *nian* (念), we will wonder how is it formed? We can see that it is formed by the characters *jin* (今) and *xin* (心). So, what does *jinxin* indicate? It signifies the present mind, it's not in the past nor the future. For example, when we say the word "right now" when we pronounce the word "now", the pronunciation of the word "right" becomes the past. So, when is it the present time? The present time doesn't exist honestly. If we want to describe it, we can only simply say "the future keeps passing through the present to become the past".

As an illustration when we take the train and look for the distant scenery, comparing it with the nearest place for example under our feet if we can see the ground of the train or look out the window at the closest floor. The further you look the less it moves, and the closer it gets the more blurry it becomes. Another example is when we are drivers and driving a high-speed train at 300km per hour, the scene in front of us constantly passes through our present and becomes the past, so we definitely can't find the present time.

Because it's very difficult to master the present time, how can we master our present thought or our present idea? While we're thinking about something, is our mind on it? It is possible that we were still thinking about this one moment ago and the next moment our mind will be dissipated. When thinking about something our mind should be on it too and totally don't have any second thoughts at all, this means *zi* (茲). So, through what we've mentioned, we can realise that it is very difficult to be ever mindful of something.

This is a more simplified explanation, if we complicate it, about illustrating illustrious virtue, renovating the people, and resting in the highest excellence, especially the idea of the highest excellence, we must devote our whole life to it. So, our aim should be extended to something for our whole life, it can't be a short idea. The character *zi* refers to *benxing mingde* (本性明

德) which means self-nature, and illustrious virtue, and they exactly represent the highest excellence. In consequence, *nianzi zaizi* is bearing in mind constantly our self-nature and our illustrious virtue, which is called *zhi* (止) which is to stabilise.

Why do we say: “the point where to rest being known, the object of pursuit is then determined”⁴? *Zhi* is what our heart desires and knows. The purpose we have in our minds now is to rest in the highest excellence and to illustrate our illustrious virtue. If we don’t forget this aim, our direction will be certain. So the character *ding* (定) refers to orientation, a certain direction, therefore we can know that *zhi* has an orientation. So our mind should keep on illustrating illustrious virtue and renovating the people, this is called *zhizhi* (知止).

Secondly, the character *ding* means having a purpose, our goal is clearly defined, our attention is fixed on what we are doing, our final goal is to rest the highest excellence and to illustrate illustrious virtue, and then *mianchi bubian* (勉持不變). The character *mian* (勉) means self-encouragement and the character *chi* (持) is to maintain and stick to our aim. If having a certain direction, strengthen our ambitions, and can’t be destabilised, then our mind can be calm. So, being determined comes from knowing where to rest, resting on how to illustrate illustrious virtue, and renovating people. Accordingly, our minds will not be changed, this is called “being determined”.

Then is *jing* (靜) which means calmness, very peaceful and quiet. If we can clearly define a purpose, can determine a certain direction, can self-encourage, and cannot be easily changed, if we try our best to make all these efforts our impatience will be released. So, calmness is not as easy to attain, we must as said earlier be determined. The character *jiu* (久) signifies the time, and our impatience could be released slowly. Here, the two characters *zaoshi* (躁釋) are the keyword. The more we are released properly the more we will not be influenced, not be attracted. So what’s the meaning again of the character *wang* (妄)? It means ideas and illusions. But what exactly is the significance of illusion? Everything that affects and interferes with our normal mind is called illusion, in other words, we can call it “remaining unmoved”.

⁴ James Legge, The Chinese Classics Vol. 1 (Taipei: SMC Publishing INC., 2016), p. 356.

The next one is *an* (安), so that calmness will succeed in tranquil repose. *An* refers to being tranquil and happy, our heart doesn't change unusually. Let's see more precisely: the character *tai* (泰) signifies: being stable, peaceful, and carefree; and the character *yi* (怡) means content, and joyful. All these come from calmness, if we are still so impatient and impetuous all these will disappear. Therefore, after being calm we will not change at once on seeing something different. Here, the characters *yi* (異) and *qian* (遷) are verbs, our heart is still the same it will not change as easily, and this means *an*. In consequence, while the heart is at peace, the body and mind will be at ease too.

When our mind is at peace, then we can *lu* (慮). For the character *lu*, M. Li Bing Nan explains it very simply as *jingyan mingbian* (精研明辨). The significance of the character *lu* is thinking. The contrary of the character *jing* (精) is thick and similarly is thin, so it means delicacy. Then, what is *yan* (研)? It signifies research, precise research, and distinguishing carefully and clearly. So before thinking, there is calmness and only after calmness, we will be able to think. Thinking should be when the mind is clear, we always say that the plan of the day depends on the morning. We should research this Great Learning Teaches with our mind, doing things that are completely beneficial to the people of the world, and this is called *lu*. So only after that, you'll get the attainment of the desired end.

The last one is *de* (得) and generally speaking, it refers to the gains of knowledge and comprehension. However, these gains all return to illustrate illustrious virtue and to rest in the highest excellence. Otherwise, the understanding of truths and things violates our virtue and the highest excellence. These give an explanation of why we should first know the point where to rest, and then the object of pursuit will be determined, then a calm unperturbedness may be attained to, then succeed a tranquil repose, then may be careful deliberation and at last the attainment of the desires end. Consequently, that's why we have to follow the order mentioned earlier, we can't try to advance by skipping necessary steps, we need to do it step-by-step. The order cannot be reversed, which explains that many things can't be rushed, success comes naturally, and hushing is not useful.

Dedicating our lives to others, then thinking about things will naturally have wisdom, as a result, researching things would certainly be successful. And then we can get illustrious virtue and the ability to renovate the people, achieve the Great Learning teaches.

III- Conclusion

In conclusion, I will talk about what M. Xu Xing Min said about this chapter. He mentioned the word *shiyān* (詩眼) which refers to the keyword of poetry, because poetry always has a key sentence, and there is a keyword in each sentence, this is called *shiyān*. He said “Studying the Great Learning, learning how to become a sage, don’t mess up the order, we should learn step-by-step. Before the five characters *dingjing anlu de* (定靜安慮得), there is the character *zhi* (止).” If we don’t rest, and we are just determined, this means that we are wrong because we found an aim randomly which had a little value.

To summarise, we should know the point where to rest before the other five steps. If the point where to rest is inaccurate, the purpose of our learning is set incorrectly, then the next five steps will be wrong too. This means that the point where to rest is very important, but there is another step before this which is the character *zai* (在) which means “is in”⁵, we can see here the character three times. It has the same meaning as what we’ve said earlier as a keyword, they are the most important spirit. M. Xu explained the character *zai* as real: a real illustrious virtue, a real renovation of people, and a real rest in the highest excellence. Anyway, this character cannot be ignored.

⁵ James Legge, The Chinese Classics Vol. 1 (Taipei: SMC Publishing INC., 2016), p. 356.

Bibliography

Books:

- Legge, James, *The Chinese Classics Vol. 1* (Taipei: SMC Publishing INC., 2016)
- Li, Bing Nan, *Liji Xuanjiang* (Taichung: Taizhongshi Fojiao Lianshe, 2018)