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Undergraduate assignment feedback form

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A True Luck of Life

Word Count: 1400

Respected Provost, Miss Deng and my classmates, good afternoon. My name is Siyao Zeng. The topic I would like to share with you today is 'A True Luck of Life'.

The presentation is separated into five parts: first I would give you a brief introduction. Second, I would introduce a teaching from *the Doctrine of the Mean*. Third, I would give definitions and interpretations of this teaching. After that is my personal understanding. And finally, my conclusion.

Introduction

The Doctrine of the Mean (*Zhongyong* 中庸) is a famous work written by Confucius' grand son Zi Si 子思, giving guidelines of highest principle of morality to Chinese people through the ages. In this presentation, I would try to discuss the attitude towards life and fate shown by a teaching recorded in it.

Original Texts

Now let's see the original text.

「君子居易以俟命，小人行險以僥倖。」

'The examplary man, *Junzi*, lives out the even tenor of his life calmly, waiting for the appointment of God, whereas the vulgar person takes to dangerous courses, expecting the uncertain chances of luck.'[1]

This teaching shows different attitudes of facing life and fate. Basically, we should learn from *Junzi*, and avoid being a vulgar person, that is '小人'，which is also called 'the mean man' in

[1] Translated by Gu Hongming with modifications, *Gu Hongming Yingyi Jingdian, the Great learning, the Doctrine of the Mean*《辜鴻銘英譯經典：大學 中庸》 (Beijing: Zhong Hua Book Company, 2017) , p.164.

some other Chinese classics. It points that we should be ‘waiting for the appointment of God’, which may easily confuse readers --Isn’t it a negative attitude towards life? Now please allow me to discuss the implication behind.

Interpretation

Now please look at the first term ‘*Juyi* 居易’. The word ‘*Yi* 易’ is often used as an adjective ‘easy’ or a verb ‘change’. But here, according to the annotation of Zheng Xuan, an ancient Chinese scholar, it is defined as ‘calm and peaceful’. It means that an examplary man, *Jun Zi*, could stay calm and peaceful whatever he done and wherever he been, to achieve a balance between himself and the external situation.

Now let’s look at the term *Siming* 俟命. It had been defined as ‘waiting for the appointment of God’. Well this definition is quite right in literal meaning but sometimes it sounds like a Chinese idiom *Tingtian Youming* 聽天由命, which means ‘we are at the mercy of fate’, it could be easily associated with those negative emotions and passive attitudes. However, in my opinion, this is not the term *Siming* 俟命 truly mean.

Siming 俟命, in fact, in this teaching, has a subtext, that is the natural law. One of the rules is, any of our behaviour is bound to result in certain effect and consequence. Simply good deeds cause good return, bad deeds cause bad return. In other word, we are eventually made to answer for our actions, and what we do at present is determining what will come to us in the future. Therefore, we should understand that *Siming* 俟命 is not really means waiting someone’s appointment , but waiting for a fate that is created by ourselves.

Knowing that the current fate is caused by the past, an examplary, *Junzi*, could peacefully accept his encounters of good or bad, instead of resenting or surprising. Moreover, as a *Junzi*, he always treats others with respect and good manner. Therefore, he would always receive the same return, or even control his fate. Clearly, the principle is, changing one’s pattern of mentality and behavior now is changing one’s fate in the future. If we could sincerely follow

this principle, we would form a positive circle and eventually achieve peace of mind and external harmony.

Now let's come to the next sentence. 'whereas the vulgar person takes to dangerous courses, expecting the uncertain chances of luck.'

As the question mentioned before, are those aggressive behaviour and brave attempts for success have been wrong? In fact, the key point of this sentence lies in the word *Xian* 險, which means 'dangerous'. If we aim to do good to others or to the public, of course we should be aggressive and persevere in order to achieve it. This is a commendable attitude towards our lives and the society. On the contrary, if we do dangerous and incorrect things with the same enthusiasm and bravery, that there is no differences with criminals or terrorists, and the ending as well.

Now let's look at the term *Jiaoxing* 徼幸. The word *Jiao* 徼 means 'pursue' while *Xing* 幸 literally means 'luck'. However in Chinese, according to *the Grand Chinese Dictionary* (漢語大字典), 'luck' in this teaching had a definition of 'to gain an unexpected profit or avoid disaster'. It means, if we want to gain profits, we should first pay an investment. By this way we deserve those profits as our rewards. Conversely, if we did not pay our cost but gain great profits, that means we do not deserve it and would lose it soon. While this kind of gain called *Xing* 幸. Therefore, when combining *Jiao* 徼 and *Xing* 幸, it could be defined as 'take a risk to pursue improper profits'.

Personal Understanding

From the perspective of philosophy, those behaviour of taking chances to pursue improper profits is related to fluky psychology. Fluky psychology is essentially a doubt about inevitability and an expectation of contingency in line with needs or desires. However, the development of things has its own law, which is the natural law we have mentioned, violation of this law would inevitably be punished. For example, embezzlers always expect to get the maximum return with the minimum investment. Well fluke is also a kind of gambler's

psychology. Whenever they make money crazily, they are actually gambling with their own life, freedom and family. However, when the consequences come, gamblers, which is called ‘the mean man’ in *the Doctrine of the Mean*, are often unable to bear, let alone facing them calmly. There is a sum-up in Buddhism, ‘Bodhisattvas are afraid of the causes, while all living beings are afraid of the effects.’

In nowadays society, traps and temptations can be found everywhere. Even if we avoid taking chances or being gamblers, we are likely being defrauded or losing friends by our covetousness of getting small gains. And this is also a kind of fluky psychology. Therefore, to avoid swallowing a gudgeon, we should learn to hold a mentality of *Juyi* 居易, it means to keep our heart upright and behaviour correct, do not expect any uncertain luck, then cheaters and traps could hardly do harm to us. It is easy to see that *Juyi* 居易 is a wise way to stay safe in such a world of trick, and a way to have peace of mind and achieve real success.

However, there is another situation. Sometimes we are not committing crime or coveting small gains. However, if behaviour is unsafe, it is also a matter of ‘taking chances’. For instance, extreme sports. Although researchers have found many positive effects of extreme sports towards individuals, exclaimed that ‘Participant’s experience of extreme sports was revealed in terms of intense fear, but this fear was integrated and experienced as a potentially meaningful and constructive event in their lives’,[2] or ‘Understanding fear as a potentially transform process.’[3] All this sounds attractive, but think seriously, these benefits are based on a prerequisite of ‘we are live’. If these self-developments need our lives as a cost, I am afraid I could not see the point of doing these. I’m not denying the spirit of adventure, but when come to dangerous actions, we should think clearly and make sure that we are ready to afford any accident or sever consequences. And before this, we should be level-headed that luck out is not a real success.

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[2] Eric Brymer and Robert Schweitzer (2012) Extreme sports are good for your health: A phenomenological understanding of fear and anxiety in extreme sport. Journal of Health Psychology 18(4) 477–487.

[3] Eric Brymer and Robert Schweitzer (2012) Extreme sports are good for your health: A phenomenological understanding of fear and anxiety in extreme sport. Journal of Health Psychology 18(4) 477–487.

In addition, all those advantages of extreme sports are considered from the point of view of a very personal demand, rather than from those who is responsible for this person and this person is now responsible for. If we do not have these two kind of relationships in the world, surely we could say 'I live for adventure' confidently. But if we have one, please be merciful to those men, women or children, whom may love us most.

Conclusion

In conclusion, when uncertain luck come to us, it might not be a genuine benefit for us; when we could live out the even tenor of our lives calmly, enjoy the happiness from a peaceful life, then congratulations, we are in real luck. Well this is the true luck of life that *the Doctrine of the Mean* tell us.