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A Brief Analysis of the Initial Three Aspects of Etiquette and Morality

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Venerable Master Shengmiao, Miss Deng, good morning. My name is Feng Yingran and I would like to share with you the topic on the analysis of the initial three aspects of etiquette and morality.

The presentation will be divided into five parts. First, this article is triggered by a social phenomenon, that is, people who do not learn etiquette cannot stand a foothold in the society. Then it discusses and elaborates the practical significance of etiquette and morality and its effect after implementation from the three aspects of deportment, expression, and speech. In the end, it summarizes the significance of etiquette and morality in modern society and the necessity of people's further study.

1. Introduction

Whether at home or at school, we have heard the saying that manners are necessary to get a foothold in society. If we can observe carefully, we will find that this statement is also true in many social situations. If a person does not know the etiquette, he will not get along well with others, and will encounter great frustrations in the way of life. In short, he will be rejected everywhere in the society. Then, from what aspects is etiquette and morality established? How to do can be said to have the basis of etiquette

and morality? There is a sentence in *the Book of Rites* that ‘the beginning of etiquette lies in correct deportment, solemn expression, and proper speech’.¹ Indeed, a man of good cultivation must be respectful in deportment and expression, and modest and deferential in speech. This is not only the expression of his inner cultivation, but also the expression of respect for others. It seems that as early as thousands of years ago, our ancestors had clearly pointed out the initial and key of etiquette and morality. What are the practical implications of all three? And how do we do that? The three aspects will be described and discussed in the following article.

2. *Zheng Rongti* 正容體

Rong ti 容體 means the behavior of the limbs.² *Zheng* 正 means correct deportment. Therefore, *Zheng Rongti* 正容體 means that one should regulate one's behavior and not behave improperly. This aspect was first mentioned because one's body language is one of the first things people notice when they get along with others. This is where you can judge whether a person is polite or not. Therefore, proper behavior is very important.

The Book of Rites also detailed that a gentleman should pay attention to nine aspects of his deportment. The first one is *zurongzhong* 足容重.³ A gentleman should walk with a steady gait. Because you can tell a man's state of mind by his pace. If he is agitated, his steps will sound hurried. If he is impetuous, his gait will sound the same

¹ Translated by myself, Sun Xidan 孫希旦, *Liji Jijie* 禮記集解(Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju 中華書局, 2018)p.1411

² Translated by myself, Sun Xidan 孫希旦, *Liji Jijie* 禮記集解 p.1411

³ Translated by myself, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, Kong Yingda 孔穎達, *Liji Zhengyi* 禮記正義 (Beijing: Peking University Press,2000) p.1078

as his mind. Because a gentleman is leisurely, his steps seem steady. The second is *shouronggong* 手容恭.⁴ Because ancient scholars needed to salute each other when they met, so you can see a person's mentality from this. That is said that one's hands should be raised high and straight when one salutes, which is the outward manifestation of the inner respect. The third is *murongduan* 目容端.⁵ That means when you get along with other people, you should not look away. If you do this, people will think that you do not respect them or that you have something on your mind and are afraid to make eye contact. The fourth is *kourongzhi* 口容止.⁶ We should not talk too much when we are talking with other people. Sometimes it is important to keep silent. It is said in *the Book of Changes* that 'lucky people talk less and impetuous people talk more'.⁷ The fifth is *shengrongjing* 聲容靜.⁸ This means do not cough and do not shiver when you talk. This way, the listener will hear you clearly and the speaker will look good. The sixth is *tourongzhi* 頭容直.⁹ A person's head should not be tilted but should be kept straight. The seventh is *qirongsu* 氣容肅.¹⁰ This means breathing calmly and not panting violently. The eighth is *lirongde* 立容德.¹¹ This means that a gentleman should bend slightly when standing, not hold his head high, which will appear arrogant and not modest enough. The ninth is *serongzhuang* 色容莊.¹² This means that the expression

⁴ Translated by myself, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, *Liji Zhengyi* 禮記正義 p.1078

⁵ Translated by myself, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, *Liji Zhengyi* 禮記正義 p.1078

⁶ Translated by myself, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, *Liji Zhengyi* 禮記正義 p.1078

⁷ Translated by myself, Ruanyuan 阮元, *Shisanjing Zhushu* 十三經註疏, *Zhouyizhengyi* 周易正義(Taipei: Yiwen Yinshuguan 藝文印書館, 2000) p.177

⁸ Translated by myself, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, *Liji Zhengyi* 禮記正義 p.1078

⁹ Translated by myself, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, *Liji Zhengyi* 禮記正義 p.1078

¹⁰ Translated by myself, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, *Liji Zhengyi* 禮記正義 p.1078

¹¹ Translated by myself, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, *Liji Zhengyi* 禮記正義 p.1078

¹² Translated by myself, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, *Liji Zhengyi* 禮記正義 p.1078

should be neither servile nor overbearing, so that it will appear more solemn. If the above nine aspects of deportment requirements are achieved, it will show a solemn gentleman appearance.

3. *Qiyanse* 齊顏色

Yanse 顏色 means facial expression.¹³ *Qiyanse* 齊顏色 means to have a serious and solemn expression. We may say that the expression is a person's second face.¹⁴ A person's inner happiness, anger, sad and happiness are reflected in the external expression, so you need to pay attention to your expression when interacting with others. Keep your expression serious and do not show anything else. It is also a key to cultivate one's morality. *The Book of Rites* says that 'if the appearance is not dignified and respectful for a moment, then the idea of frivolity will follow'.¹⁵ From here we can see the relationship between people's external expression and inner psychological activities. If a person is disrespectful on the outside, it is also a reflection of his inner world is also disrespectful. On the contrary, if a person's external performance can be more solemn, in fact, it is to protect their inner heart from the influence of wrong ideas, so that they can often have vigilance, dare not neglect and slack off any relevant people and things. This is a two-way and positive effect. That is why *Qiyanse* 齊顏色 so important.

The expression needs to be solemn, but that does not mean we should not smile. If we understand it in this way, it will be a little narrow and rigid, and it will make the

¹³ Translated by myself, Sun Xidan 孫希旦, *Liji Jijie* 禮記集解 p.1411

¹⁴ Yuyuan 于媛, *Without Propriety, There is No Standing. Civility and Decorum Walk with Me.* (Beijing:Beijing Book Co. Inc., 2017) p.15

¹⁵ Translated by myself, Sun Xidan 孫希旦, *Liji Jijie* 禮記集解 p.1225

implementation of etiquette suffer many unnecessary difficulties and obstacles, after all, no one likes to communicate with a person who keeps a straight face every day.

Moreover, the implementation and promotion of etiquette is to let people get along more harmoniously, so the correct understanding of *Qiyanse* 齊顏色 can be correctly implemented, to achieve its original purpose. In some important and solemn occasions, such as: sacrifice to ancestors, we should keep a solemn expression and cannot laugh. However, we can smile when we get along with others at ordinary times. Not only will you not lose your gravitas, but you will make other people feel comfortable and want to socialize with you. The ancients would take care not to show their teeth when smiling, which is a polite and reserved smile. In modern times, we do not have to worry about whether we show our teeth when we smile, so long as it is the appropriate smile in different places. For example, when attending someone's wedding, we sincerely send our blessings and smile, the other person will feel very warm. Or, if your friend shares a funny story with you, you can have a good laugh, which is also a heartwarming feedback to your friend.

4. *Shunciling* 順辭令

Ciling 辭令 refers to speech.¹⁶ *Shunciling* 順辭令 means to speak modestly and respectfully.¹⁷ We can understand it in this way, and it can help us to properly deal with other people in social or diplomatic situations. The importance of words is self-evident. From interpersonal communication to business contact and even international

¹⁶ Translated by myself, Sun Xidan 孫希旦, *Liji Jijie* 禮記集解 p.1412

¹⁷ Wang Yunwu 王雲五, *Liji Jinzhujinyi* 禮記今註今譯 (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 2009) p.1041

connection, it can be said that the way we speak represents individuals, companies and even countries. Therefore, we should be humble and respectful when communicating with others, which is not only a kind of external image building, but also expresses our attitude towards communicating with others. Objectively speaking, many things can be carried out based on the mutual respect and cooperation. If the words are arrogant and rude, it will not only damage the individual or collective image, but also make the other party interrupt the willingness to communicate, which will make the wrong thing to do.

Cautioning and respecting of speech is not only necessary in ancient society, but also applicable in modern society. We should pay attention to our different identities in different situations for making the correct response. There are many teachings in *the Book of Rites* about this. For example, ‘when we are discussing with the teacher, if the teacher is asking us a question, we must wait until the teacher finishes before answering’.¹⁸ This is because we are the identity of students, so we should have the attitude of respecting teacher. Similarly, when elders are talking, we should not interrupt casually. When we are in a meeting, we should wait for the leader to finish speaking before expressing our own opinions. When applied to interpersonal communication, no matter what kind of status the other person is, we should not interrupt when he is expressing an opinion, which is an act of respect to the other person. ‘When we are in mourning, do not talk about happy things. When we are sacrificing to our ancestors, we should not talk about evil things’.¹⁹ Because these are very serious occasions, if we laugh and play at that time is disrespectful to the dead. Similarly, there are many such

¹⁸ Translated by myself, Sun Xidan 孫希旦, *Liji Jijie* 禮記集解 p.39

¹⁹ Translated by myself, Sun Xidan 孫希旦, *Liji Jijie* 禮記集解 p.114

important occasions in modern times, if we go to attend someone's wedding, we have to say some auspicious and blessing words. If we attend some business gatherings, we need to show our professionalism and promote cooperation. Therefore, in these social occasions, we should clearly know our identity and say something corresponding to our identity. Otherwise, improper words and deeds will not only damage the image of the individual or the group, but also add some unnecessary obstacles. Of course, the ancients required *Shunciling* 順辭令 is not only to be able to cope with these social occasions and people calmly, but also a kind of internal moral cultivation. A man's words reflect whether he is sincere and respectful in heart. In turn, being careful with your words can also remind you if there is something wrong in your heart and can help you better correct the mistakes of arrogance and disrespect. Therefore, this is the beginning of etiquette and morality, but also the beginning of self-cultivation of moral character.

5. Conclusion

Through the above three aspects of the discussion, it can be seen that the ritual of *rongyi* 容儀 is of great significance to the cultivation of body and mind or in social life. Ancient capping ceremony symbolized the maturity of a life, and before that, the rite of *rongyi* 容儀 was of great significance in education. Because its requirements are detailed to all aspects of life, and in these aspects can reflect a person's moral cultivation and the way to cope. This is also the reason why 〈*Guanli* 冠禮〉 puts it at the beginning of etiquette and morality. To sum up, no matter body language, facial expression, or

speech, is an indispensable part of etiquette. When all three can have, it can be said that it has a complete etiquette. At the same time, these three are also the essentials of self-cultivation, they are not only the test of a person's external appearance standard, but also the external embodiment of the inner spiritual state. A person must have these three aspects of the requirements, then he can succeed in a special field of study. Because the trivial things in life more reflect a person's moral style, only with a real cautious and respectful attitude, he can get along well with others, and do things more considerate, so that it is not easy to do wrong.

The ancients had high requirements on these three aspects, which became the code of conduct handed down from generation to generation. Such cultural deposits have continued until now. Even if people have not read the relevant teachings in *the Book of Rites*, they will unconsciously apply them in real life. It can be said that 'the Chinese have succeeded in making etiquette as instinctive as their education'.²⁰ No matter what kind of occasion, such ideas are deeply rooted in people's hearts. If a person acts as he pleases in Chinese society without paying attention to etiquette, he will not be able to stand on his own feet. Because 'the reason why people are called people, is because people know etiquette and morality'.²¹ Otherwise, they are no different from animal. Therefore, etiquette is also very important in modern society. We should follow the teachings of the ancients and make etiquette and morality shine with new brilliance in the modern society.

This is all for my presentation, any feedback and suggestions would be appreciated.

²⁰ Ming Enpu 明恩溥, *Chinese Temperament* (Beijing: Dongfang Chubenshe 东方出版社, 2014), p.26

²¹ Translated by myself, Sun Xidan 孫希旦, *Liji Jijie* 禮記集解 p.1411

Thank you for listening.

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