



Undergraduate assignment feedback form

(to be completed by marker)

<i>Student Name:</i> Xue Chunyuan (薛淳元)	
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<i>Marker's signature:</i>	<i>Date:</i>
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The dwelling place of the sage is not easy and comfortable

character count:1829

Respected provost and Miss Deng, my name is Xue Chunyuan. The topic I want to share with you today is ‘The dwelling place of the sage is not easy and comfortable’. I will briefly introduce the text Wuyi 無逸 in *Book of History* from *The Governing Principles of Ancient China* and share the part that makes me feel the most and some of my experience after learning it.

This is my outline.

1. Introduction
2. The texts analysis
3. Self-reflection
4. Conclusion

Introduction

Wuyi 無逸 this article is from *Book of History*. However, what we learned in this course is *The Governing Principles of Ancient China*. Therefore, the version that I chose is an abridged version by Wei Zheng and it is not the full text. So let us take a look at what is *The Governing Principles of Ancient China*. This book was compiled for Emperor Taizong by Wei Zheng and Taizong’s ministers during the Tang Dynasty. Among them, Wei Zheng selected the quintessence of various ancient Chinese classics and condensed them all into this set of books, which contains the spirit and behavior of ancient sages. It is because of his concentration that the busy emperor can have time to learn so many traditional Chinese classics. And the chapter I have chosen for today comes from this edition.

The texts analysis

Here, I choose two paragraphs that impress me deeply. The first one is ‘A place

where virtuous people live, there is no comfort of their own. Think about the hardship of the people farming and then think about the well-being of the people, and then you know what do people depend on.’¹ At the beginning of this passage, the Duke of Zhou directly warns the King Cheng of Zhou not to be greedy for pleasure. But to focus on how to let the people can live a better life, understand the hardship of the people. And then he talked about being able to feel the hardship of farming. This is because farming is what farmers do for a living, and by thinking about where they need help most, we can understand their real needs. This is one of the two paragraphs that impressed me most.

The other paragraphs shows how the sages of the Zhou Dynasty practiced. The translation of this passage is, ‘However, our great-grandfather Taiwang and grandfather Wangji of the Zhou Dynasty were able to keep their own modesty and always hold the fear and respect of heaven in their hearts. King Wen of Zhou always wore coarse clothes. He was often busy in the morning and had no time to eat until the sun started west. During this time, he is always thinking about how he can make the world live harmoniously all the time while he is doing things. His reign spanned fifty years. There are four people who faced the people of the world with their wisdom and virtue: Zhongzong, Gaozong, Zujia from the Yin dynasty and King Wen from the Zhou dynasty. If they are told that the people are complaining about them and cursing them, they will be more careful about their conduct. If you cannot do that, then when someone tells a story about people cursing you, you will believe it and punish/kill the innocent. To do so would be to focus on the resentment of the people on oneself.’

²From this passage we can see that the Duke of Zhou gave many examples of sages and wise kings in ancient times. What they do is not to think about their own well-being, but to focus on the people. For example, King Wen of Zhou began to be busy very early and even did not have meals, but still thought about the well-being of the people of the world. When someone criticizes them, they will not blame others but

¹ Wei Zheng 魏征, Yu Shinan 虞世南, Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 and so on, Qun Shu Zhi Yao 群書治要(Beijing: Unity Press, 2011.5)p.96.

² Wei Zheng 魏征, Yu Shinan 虞世南, Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 and so on, Qun Shu Zhi Yao 群書治要 p.96.

immediately reflect on their own problems to consider if there is anything they have not done well. This is where you see the difference between these sages and the common people. They are in a very noble position but they do not use their rights to help themselves to obtain welfare to satisfy their own desires. It is because of this that they can receive the support of the people and stay in power for a long and stable time. But if a king fails to do so, he will end up focusing on the resentment of the people on himself, so his reign will not last long and the state will not be stable.

Self-reflection

The above is my analysis of the text, and the following is my personal experience after learning. This is not my first time learning this texts, but when I decided to study it again, it still made me feel very touched. The biggest reminder that this article gave me when I read it is that we can not always think about our own comfort. In the concept of modern society, many people believe that the meaning of living is to constantly pursue a better life. Growing up in such an environment, I used to believe that we study and work for a better life later on. Like being able to live in a bigger house or earn more money. However, at the beginning of the text, it is mentioned that a virtuous man's life is not easy or comfortable. It really shocked me because I felt that we do not have to be poor to study Chinese classics or become a saint. But as I read on, I realised that this does not mean that we cannot live well, but that we do not pursue these things, we do not live for these desires. So when I first started practicing the above, I told myself that I could not have fun, that I would always control my desire. I will check whether I have the heart to enjoy my daily life. But as time went by I found it very painful to study. I found that I did not find the cause of the problem, but I knew there must be something wrong with me. Because Confucius told us that learning and practicing would be a very happy thing but I was not happy at that time.

So I was thinking, is it really necessary for us to be uncomfortable in everything we do? Does this uncomfortable feeling affect our mood? Do saints become unhappy because they are too busy? It did not seem that way after a series of questions. This

article is not to tell us that we cannot relax, and it certainly does not affect our mood because we are busy. Later, in a conversation with my teacher, I came to understand this truth by accident. I remember my teacher once told me that the difference between saints and ordinary people is that the heart of helping others is greater than selfishness. At that moment, I realized that the lack of comfort in this article does not mean that we cannot do it, but that we do not seek comfort ourselves. We do not think of our goal of learning as the pursuit of greater enjoyment. Our goal is to make the world a better place. Just as the heart of the saint is always considerate of the people's hardships. Greater ones, such as the Buddha, want the whole world to be free of suffering. It made me feel that they were not thinking selfishly of their own needs but of as many people as possible. However, after introspecting myself, I found that I was still thinking for myself and did not expand my mind to consider others. At that moment, I realized that saints are not thinking about themselves, and their every thought is for the whole society, the country, and even the world.

But thinking of this, I began to wonder whether it would be very tiring to think for others and not for their own lives. Would they still feel happy? Because Confucius once said that learning would be a happy thing, Mr. Fang Dongmei also said that learning the Buddha's teachings is the highest enjoyment of life. But if we do not study, live, and work to be happy, what is our purpose? How can we be happy if we do not chase after comfort? Although I still had a lot of doubts, I decided to give it a try. So I began to practice from putting down my own selfishness. When I encountered each situation, if I could remember it, I would ask myself whether I had considered others first. Especially when others needed my help, I used to wonder if I was busy all the time and if I would be too tired to help; but then I would always consider whether I could help others, if I could, then I would not think too much about it and just try to help them. Although I was reluctant to do it myself at first, I always thought about it a lot. For example, if I feel that some things are difficult to do, or he has not helped me when I needed help, and so on. But although I will think a lot, I will still force myself to help, as long as I have the ability to try to do so. After a few

attempts, I really found that I could stop thinking so much about myself, and start thinking about who needs help and what can I do for others. At the same time, unconsciously, I began to realize that others do not always have it easy. As the text says, ‘Think about the hardships of the people farming.’ I began to see where people needed my help rather than waiting for them to ask me to help them. In this process, whenever I saw that others could relieve their pressures or solve their problems with my help, I would feel extremely happy. I was finally able to feel a little bit of the saint mentality. What makes me feel good is not because I get anything, but to actually see that people who are in pain can stop suffering because of our efforts. At that moment, I realized what Fan Zhongyan once said, ‘Worry before the world worries, happy after the world is happy.’³ I also realized why ‘The dwelling place of the sage is not easy and comfortable.’ Because they really can't bear to see people suffer and pursue enjoyment for themselves.

Conclusion

In conclusion, sages do not seek ease and comfort for themselves in their lives. It is not that they do not want to pursue happiness, it is that they can not bear to see others suffer. Therefore, what they do and what they think in every way, is how can they do more for the people. This is all for my report for today. All suggestions are welcome. Thank you for listening.

³ Wu Chucai 吳楚材 Wu Diaohou 吳調侯, *Gu Wen Guan Zhi* 古文觀止(Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2012.3)p.622.

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