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How to Deal with Impolite Manners in Daily Life

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Respected provost and Miss Deng, my name is Guan Wenyuan, the topic of my presentation is, 'How to Deal with Impolite Manners in Daily Life'.

The presentation will be divided into three parts. Firstly, I will briefly introduce to you some chaos caused by lack of tolerance in modern society. Then I will select some sentences from the *Changli Juyao* 常禮舉要 to discuss, how to deal with other people's impolite manners in daily life. Finally, I will summarize the different approaches we apply to resolve this issue.

I. Introduction

In today's society, it becomes very difficult to ask people to treat others with courtesy. Most people pursue freedom, and want to live as they pleased. Thus, it's exhausting for them to always keep polite, or to restrain their temper. It seems that people no longer advocate tolerance. Then what has society become? In the family, there are cases of husbands killing their wives. In school, there are conflicts between teachers and students. In the society, enterprise employees frequently change jobs. On the road, fighting for the right of way leads to severe accidents. In public, jumping into the line indiscriminately leads to disputes and even fights. The society seems to be full of anger, as soon as a small spark appears, it can be ignited immediately.

Most of the time we are accustomed to being loose with ourselves and strict with others. We would be unhappy when others see us on the road not saying hello. We also get angry when people cut in on us in line. It is also very uncomfortable for us when people come into our rooms and go through things without saying a word. Although we are now in an uncomplicated learning environment, it is inevitable that we encounter

situations where others are not so polite. After we studied the *Changli Juyao* 常禮舉要, it is easy for us to ask others to behave correctly. We could be unhappy or feel offended when anyone else acts improperly. Because it's usually much easier to pick on others than to restrain ourselves.

However, Xunzi 荀子 said that, 'Suppress your selfish desires in will and then you can do things for the public, suppress your emotions in behavior and then you can have good qualities (志忍私，然後能公；行忍情性，然後能脩).' ¹ Therefore, I would like to discuss how could we treat impolite manners based on the five sentences selected from the *Changli Juyao* 常禮舉要. How should we deal with people's words and behaviors that do not conform to courtesy in our daily life?

II. How to Deal with Impolite Manners

i. Dealing with impolite words

As the *Changli Juyao* 常禮舉要 states, 'Don't insult others with your words, and avoid making jokes about people (不侮辱人，不向人開玩笑).' ² How do we respond, when people humiliate us with words, or joke with us in a frivolous manner? At the moment, we need to hold back and suppress our temper. If we can't hold it back, we may respond with the same sarcastic remarks. Then we quarrel with each other, and the relationship is destroyed because of that. On the other hand, we may bear anger and hatred in mind that are harmful to our body. As a matter of fact, we can get out of the way first and go for a walk. This is a way to divert attention, and we may forget about it when we come back. At this time, we manage to keep our emotions under control without any conflict or getting hurt in mind. As *The Analects "Tai Bo"* 論語·泰伯 states, 'Offended against, and yet entering into no altercation (犯而不校).' ³ Because we may have made some

¹ Chinese Text Project, *Xun Zi* 荀子, <https://ctext.org/xunzi/ru-xiao>, accessed 17 November 2020.

² Li Bingnan 李炳南編述: *Changli Juyao* 常禮舉要 [Daily Manners: The Essentials of Courtesy] (Taipei: The Corporation Republic of Hwa Dzan Society, 2011), p.12, translation by the International Translation Institute.

³ Zeng Zi, Zi Si and others 曾子，子思等, *The Analects, The Doctrine of The Mean and The Great Learning* 學庸論語 (Xiamen: Xiamen University Press, 2008), p.76, translated by James Legge.

mistakes ourselves. There may be a right place in the words of others. We can reflect on what we did wrong. On reflection, our mistakes are corrected. Hence, we elevate our character and which becomes a benefit to ourselves. It turns into a matter of thanking that person. In this way, peace and happiness return to our minds.

The second sentence about words is, ‘At meal time, neither praise nor scold your children or siblings (食時不歎，不訓斥子弟)’.⁴ What if elders like our parents scold us at dinner? In fact, whether we are eating or not, when our elders reprimand us, our first reaction should not be resistance. Rather, we should think that it is not good for the elders’ health to get so angry because of us. We should immediately admit our mistakes and sincerely apologize. In this way, the emotions of the elders can be calmed down. After that, we can reflect on it seriously and will not make similar mistakes in the future. In case it was the elders who misunderstood us, not our own mistakes. Because we’ve apologized so sincerely before, when the elders know the truth, they would marvel at our virtues. As the *Mengzi* “*Li Lou II*” 孟子·離婁下 states, ‘He who loves others is constantly loved by them (愛人者人恆愛之)’.⁵ When we sincerely respect and love our elders and other people, then we can get the sincere love from them as well. However, if we had spoken back, the relationship between us and our elders would have been damaged. It would be difficult to fix it in the future. We can start by tolerating the words and deeds of others. Later on, when our characters improve, we will be able to think for others in the first place, and to love them as well.

ii. Dealing with impolite behaviors

As stated in the *Changli Juyao* 常禮舉要, ‘Walk slowly and behind when walking with someone older than you, not rapidly and in front of them (徐行後長，不疾行先長)’.⁶ How would we react if someone younger than us hurried off in front of us? One aspect

⁴ Li Bingnan 李炳南編述: *Changli Juyao* 常禮舉要 [Daily Manners: The Essentials of Courtesy] (Taipei: The Corporation Republic of Hwa Dzan Society, 2011), p.10, translation by the International Translation Institute.

⁵ Meng Zi 孟子, *Mencius* 孟子 (Xiamen: Xiamen University Press, 2008), p.136, translated by James Legge.

⁶ Li Bingnan 李炳南編述: *Changli Juyao* 常禮舉要 [Daily Manners: The Essentials of Courtesy] (Taipei: The Corporation Republic of Hwa Dzan Society, 2011), p.8, translation by the International Translation Institute.

is that the person is walking so fast that he/she may have something urgent to do. We should be able to empathize with the other's anxiety. If the person is habitually walking in front of us, there is no need to be bothered by it as well. As *The Analects* “*Wei Ling Gong*” 論語·衛靈公 states, ‘The superior man is dignified, but does not wrangle (君子矜而不爭).’⁷ We should be humble and don't think about competing with that person for a priority. The person who ignores us and goes ahead must have been felt a lack of respect for us. We need to reflect on our defects. Because it must be something that we didn't do well, that's why others will disrespect us. Turn around to reflect on ourselves' drawbacks and omissions, and therefore our character can also be improved.

Another sentence about behavior in *Changli Juyao* 常禮舉要 says, ‘Once you sit down, do not lean your elbows on the table, and don't stick out your feet (入座後不橫肱，不伸足).’⁸ We first need to be alert when we see others sitting with their elbows leaning on the table, occupying a large space, and feet sticking out casually and lazily. Do we have the same moments when we don't pay attention to manners and only consider our own comfort, regardless of the feelings of the others? It would be nice to remind that person gently. If others are unwilling to accept, then just use this to warn ourselves. In this way, we won't focus on the mistakes of others and thus there will be no negative emotions.

The third sentence about behavior states that, ‘Avoid walking in the middle of the road, look carefully left and right before crossing a road, and never fight for the right of way with automobiles (不走馬路中間，越路須先向左右看清，不可與汽車爭路).’⁹ On the road, whether we are driving, biking or walking, we need to pay particular attention. Because in case that we are not careful, we will easily be involved in danger. If others fight for the right of way with us, we should decisively give way to them. We must

⁷ Zeng Zi, Zi Si and others 曾子，子思等, *The Analects, The Doctrine of The Mean and The Great Learning* 學庸論語 (Xiamen: Xiamen University Press, 2008), p.128, translated by James Legge.

⁸ Li Bingnan 李炳南編述: *Changli Juyao* 常禮舉要 [Daily Manners: The Essentials of Courtesy] (Taipei: The Corporation Republic of Hwa Dzan Society, 2011), p.15, translation by the International Translation Institute.

⁹ Ibid., p.19.

control our mood during these life-threatening moments. Because once it gets out of control, the consequences may be very serious. We need to pay especial attention to the lives of ourselves and others. As Confucius stated in *The Analects* “*Yan Yuan*” 論語·顏淵, ‘For a morning’s anger to disregard one’s own life, and involve that of his parents - is not this a case of delusion (一朝之忿，忘其身，以及其親，非惑與)?’¹⁰ Parents are the people who care about and love us the most. We can’t bear to make them heartbroken. When we keep our parents and family in mind on the road, we will no longer fight with others because we know that they may be worrying about us.

III. Conclusion

When we are offended or others make us feel uncomfortable, we need to control our emotions. In the beginning, tolerance is basically required. as *Yi Jing* “*Sun*” 易經·損 states, ‘The superior man, restrains his wrath and represses his desires (君子以懲忿窒欲).’¹¹ We want to be people of high moral characters, so we need to control our temperament, which means to be tolerant. Afterwards, we can reflect on our inappropriate behaviors. We will get promoted after we correct our mistakes. In this way, the unpleasant situations are transformed into fortune by us. Later on, our characters will improve and we can begin to understand others. Others have their habits and reasons for doing this. We will figure out the reason behind his behavior. If we can go a step further and be able to respect and love other people from the bottom of our hearts, then there will be no offense to us in the world.

This is the end of my presentation, any suggestions and feedback would be appreciated.
Thank you for listening!

IV. Bibliography

¹⁰ Zeng Zi, Zi Si and others 曾子，子思等, *The Analects, The Doctrine of The Mean and The Great Learning* 學庸論語 (Xiamen : Xiamen University Press, 2008) , p.105, translated by James Legge.

¹¹ Chinese Text Project, *Yi Jing* 易經, <https://ctext.org/book-of-changes/sun>, accessed 17 November 2020.

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