

Exploring the Music Education of Confucianism from Two Paragraphs in *The Book of Rites*

Respected provost and Miss Deng, and everyone present, my name is Guan Wenyuan, the topic of my presentation is, 'Exploring the Music Education of Confucianism from Two Paragraphs in *The Book of Rites*'.

The presentation will be divided into three parts. Firstly, I will talk about my motivation for choosing this topic. Secondly, I will explain two paragraphs selected from *The Book of Rites*. Thirdly, I will talk about my feelings about learning these paragraphs.

Now, I will tell you my motivation for choosing this topic.

Music education is a very important part of Confucius' education. If it is said that etiquette education is convergent, then music education is divergent, and the two are indispensable. The combination of ritual and music education helps those who study Confucius' teachings to improve their character and live-in harmony with other beings in nature.

And, I will now introduce the first paragraph that I selected from *The Book of Rites*.

「人生而靜，天之性也；感於物而動，性之欲也。物至知知，然後好惡形焉。好惡無節於內，知誘於外，不能反躬，天理滅矣。」

What is '人生而靜'? Zheng Xuan said that this '靜' refers to a state of still.

Therefore, when human nature is not exposed to external 'substances', life is basically in a quiet state without desire. Hence, '靜' refers to a state in which desires are not expressed, which is our human nature. Once people come into contact with the external matter, they will have desire. After we come into contact with things, we have sensations. Immediately afterwards, feelings of like or dislike are formed in our minds. If the likes and dislikes are not adjusted in the mind and we cannot reflect on ourselves, the quiet state of human nature will be destroyed.

The Book of Rites does not deny the natural needs of human beings. People's desires, likes and dislikes are not a problem. As said in *The Great Learning*, "what is meant by 'making the thoughts sincere' is the allowing no self-deception". The biggest problem

is that we have no control over our likes and dislikes. We feel hungry and want to eat, feel cold and want to wear more clothes. This is how human nature is. But when we are full, we still want to eat more, when our clothes are warm enough, and we want to buy more and more of them. This is no longer our internal or physical need, but we are still repeatedly tempted by them. This is called intemperance. And this is where we need to control and practice.

We may like one thing very much, or we may hate one thing very much. If we can reflect on ourselves: what are the reasons for these hates or likes? We will make progress by considering these questions and regulating ourselves. If we just let it go, and are simply affected by external things, we will become a walking corpse controlled by external matter. As long as the environment is good, we will be in a positive state. Once the environment deteriorates, we also fall. We can't let things just happen like this, and we need to learn to reflect and regulate ourselves.

Now let me give the above paragraph a refined explanation:

To be still at one's birth, belongs to the nature of human beings. As we are acted on by external things, our activity shows itself and develops the desires. Things come to us more and more, and then the manifestations of liking and disliking are arisen. When these are not regulated by anything within, and we cannot reflect on ourselves, and our pure nature is thus extinguished.

Next, I will introduce the second paragraph, and I hope it will help us with reflection and self-regulation.

「天高地下，萬物散殊，而禮制行矣。流而不息，合同而化，而樂興焉。春作夏長，仁也；秋斂冬藏，義也。仁近於樂，義近於禮。」

It says, 天高地下，萬物散殊. Between heaven and earth, various creatures live. ‘散’ is scattered around, and ‘殊’ is different.

The important spirit of the music education taught by Confucius is that, although all beings in nature are so different, we can still live together in harmony. If we require everyone and everything to be the same and not to change, then it deviates from the spirit of Confucius' music education. Because the spirit of Yue emphasizes fluidity, which never ceases.

We can experience the virtues of nature, as well as heaven and earth, from the changes in solar terms. In spring and summer, life multiplies and grows, which symbolizes the spirit of benevolence. In autumn and winter, various creatures begin to converge and

store, which is the spirit of righteousness.

The education of music in Confucianism also emphasizes a state of integrity. Why does music education correspond to heaven? Because the spirit of music emphasizes divergence and integration, and it is in harmony with the aspects of heaven's fosterage and mobility. Because the education of ritual makes people feel convergent, it is like the tolerance and inclusion of the earth, so it is classified as the side of the earth. The heaven and the earth naturally have a lot of sounds, and they have endless changes. Hence, in this profound change, one can experience the natural music of heaven and earth. The sages respond to the heaven with music, and make etiquette to match the earth. Thus, when the sages are making music, they actually want to respond and repay the credit for the fostering and nurturing of heaven and earth. Therefore, with the wisdom and completeness of their education of etiquette and music, heaven and earth will have its order and all beings live harmoniously in it.

Let me also give the second paragraph a refined explanation:

There's heaven above and earth below, and between them are distributed all the various beings with their different natures, which are in accordance with the education of etiquette taught by Confucius. The influences of heaven and earth flow forth and never cease. And by their united action of fostering and nurturing, the music arose. The processes of growth in spring, and of maturing in summer suggest the idea of benevolence. While those processes of in-gathering in autumn and of storing in winter, suggest the idea of righteousness. Benevolence is akin to music, and righteousness to etiquette.

Now in the last part, I will talk about my personal thoughts about these two paragraphs.

The issue of people being materialized is often discussed in society. Under the tumult of capitalism, people lose their autonomy in life, just like something that can be calculated and quantified. After sinking into external matter, our nature is hurt and becomes only an animal of desire. We are driven by desire to realize its will, and we lose our natural purity. What surprises me is that the process of such a person being materialized is an extremely true portrayal of our current society. The ancestors of the Chinese have been thinking about such issues thousands of years ago, and this is one of the reasons why I admire the ancients so much.

I realize that the direction of our practice is to imitate and merge with nature.

Gradually letting go of our self-desires, we embrace nature. And gradually we will be able to achieve the ‘characteristic of the most entire sincerity’ in *The Doctrine of the Mean*. After that, we can sense the information conveyed by heaven and earth. In places out of sight, our various actions are also quietly changing everything in the world. If we violate the laws of heaven and earth, the results we get will probably not be what we expected. If we always give positive feedback to nature, then nature will also take care of us.

If people who overeat, people who stay up all night, people who are intoxicated in the online world and cannot help themselves, etc., can be aware of their current situation, they should consider that these actions violate the laws of nature. They also hurt their bodies and make their parents worry about them. Moreover, such a precious life as a human being will be wasted by them. Since we already have the courage to waste our lives and the courage to hurt those who care about us, why can't we have the courage to change all this?

There is no regret medicine in the world, and there is no time machine. I don't know what other people think, at least I used to really want to change the past. But this kind of thing is impossible to achieve at least for now. However, all we need to do is to convert an idea. Isn't this moment the past of future? Now that I regret what I have done in the past, will I still think this way in the future? Therefore, isn't every me at this moment equivalent to me who has returned to the past from my future? Thinking about it this way, we are able to change our past at any time. It turns out that my regret medicine in the future has been held in my hands from time to time. It just wasn't noticed by me. I hope we all have the courage to save the ‘past’ of ourselves.

That is all for my presentation today. Thank you for listening. Any feedback and suggestions would be appreciated.