



Undergraduate assignment feedback form
(to be completed by marker)

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From Hardship to Strength: The *Kun* Hexagram's Teachings

1. The Definition of Resilience

A: The topic of our presentation today is from hardship to strength: the *Kun* hexagram's teachings.

B: Zeng Jing said, 'Resilience, as a term in physics, originally refers to elasticity or elastic force, which is the force that enables an object to return to its original shape after the external force causing its deformation is removed.'

A: In 1678, the English scientist Robert Hooke proposed the famous law of elasticity. This law states that the force exerted by a spring is proportional to its elongation (within the elastic limit), and the spring's elastic coefficient (k) is determined by its physical properties such as diameter, material, and number of active coils. Suppose there are two springs, named A and B. When the two springs bear weights of the same mass, they exhibit different stretched lengths. The one with a smaller elongation has a larger elastic coefficient, meaning it has a stronger ability to resist external forces.

B: In the 1980s, Western scholar introduced the concept of 'resilience' from physics into the field of psychology, forming an independent research category. A synthesis of definitions by scholars from mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong states, 'Resilience refers to a person's psychological adjustment and positive coping abilities when facing adversities such as difficulties, pressure, and setbacks. In the process of confronting adversities, resilience enables one's mental health to recover to the state before the adversity occurred even to a more ideal psychological state. This means that a person possesses a higher level of resilience after overcoming adversities.'

A: Within Confucian culture, resilience refers to the quality of being unyielding in the face of difficulties and striving positively for progress. The Analects states, 'A benevolent person first endures hardships and then gains rewards; such a person can be called benevolent.' Therefore, to become a benevolent person (the ultimate goal of Confucian personal

cultivation), one must undergo arduous trails and unrelenting struggles, which embodies an inherent drive to actively transcend oneself. Another example is the saying, ‘A virtuous person pursues the Dao rather than material sustenance.’ (君子謀道不謀食) In this verse, the spirit of perseverance also constitutes an important connotation of resilience.

2. Resilience in the *Kun* Hexagram

B: Within Confucian thought, there has long been a profound ‘awareness of adversity.’ Contemporary scholar Zhao Zhongwei argues that this consciousness can be traced back to the time when King Wen of Zhou (BC. 1112 — 1050), while imprisoned in Youli 羑里, composed *I Ching*. Thus, *I Ching* contains rich connotations and numerous truths related to ‘awareness of adversity.’ As recorded in ‘Underlying Principles’, part 2, chapter 11, ‘King Wen, the founder of the Zhou dynasty, was held captive by the last ruler of the Yin dynasty, the tyrant Chou Hsin. He is said to have composed the judgments on the different hexagrams during his captivity. Because of the danger of his situation, all these judgments emanate from a caution that is intent on remaining without blame and thus attains success.’

A: At that time, King Zhou (ca. ? — 1046) of Yin (ca. 1300 — 1046) was tyrannical and devoid of morality. King Wen worried about the world and people and, when he was imprisoned in Youli, he interpreted the hexagrams and composed *I Ching*. Throughout this process, he is always vigilant and cautious, and engaged in self-reflection. King Wen hoped to cultivate his character and enhance his virtue and conduct through the wisdom of *I Ching*. Thus, he was able to face good and ill fortune without fear, remain composed amid prosperity or adversity. Ultimately, he attained the state of without blame.

B: Based on King Wen’s development of the sixty-four hexagrams, Confucius further selected nine hexagrams: Lv (Conduct), Qian (Modesty), Fu (the Turning Point), Heng (Duration), Sun (Reduction), Yi (Increase), Kun (Oppression), Jing (Well), and Xun (Wind) and named them ‘Nine Hexagrams of awareness of adversity’. The meaning of Nine Hexagrams of awareness of adversity shows the models of cultivating virtue and nurturing character.

A: The *Kun* Hexagram implies that noble virtues are manifested in harsh circumstances. The spirit expressed in this hexagram shares some common ideas with the word ‘resilience’ in

Western psychology. Furthermore, if we refer to the Qing Dynasty Kangxi's *Imperial Lectures on the I Ching*, its discussions on the *Kun* Hexagram focus on interpreting how leaders break through adversity? How they cultivate themselves in adversity and waiting for the right moment. The interpretation of *Textbook Daily lecture on the I Ching* may serve as a reference for contemporary leaders. When they face adversities and challenges, they could find the way to resolve difficulties. Leaders could turn peril into safety, and achieve self-transcendence as well as shared prosperity for their organizations when facing adversities.

3. The Adversities in the *Kun* Hexagram

B: Because of the time limit for this presentation, I cannot go through each line of the hexagram in detail. Instead, I have referred to Wu Shoumin's article 'Explanation of the *Kun* Hexagram in the *Zhouyi*' and made some small adjustments. I will retell the message of the *Kun* Hexagram in the form of a short story, so that it is easier to understand.

The *Kun* Hexagram mainly describes the journey of a superior man, from seeking position, to waiting for an appointment, and finally to attending the appointment. Through this process, the text indirectly shows how one should face adversities and how he may overcome them. The hexagram says:

A: A long time ago, there was a superior man. He was upright, but his life was full of hardships.

1. **(Six at the beginning):** One day, while performing a family ritual, he learned from the result that whether he stayed at home or went out, danger would await him.
2. **(Nine in the second place)** So, he had no choice but to remain at home. At first, he felt troubled and drank wine to ease his worries. Unexpectedly, he then received a reward from his ruler—a position of honour. From this, he realized that staying calm, keeping faith, and showing devotion would bring blessings.
3. **(Six in the third place)** Later, he grew impatient, wondering why the ruler's appointment was taking so long. He set out on his own, but soon fell into a dangerous situation, trapped with no way forward or back, nearly losing his life.
4. **(Nine in the fourth place)** Fortunately, he realized that although the ruler's reward seemed slow in coming, it would surely arrive in the end. There was no need for anxiety.
5. **(Nine in the fifth place)** At last, the command for his appointment came. He put on

the red robe of office and prepared to leave. But as he walked, he was tripped by the long fringes of his clothing. This taught him that only by moving carefully and slowly could he truly overcome difficulties.

6. **(Six at the top)** Even though thorns still tangled his steps, he understood that such obstacles were not serious. By cutting them away and moving forward with courage, he would finally reach good fortune.

From this hexagram, we can see how the ancient people, when facing adversities, showed a spirit of perseverance and an unyielding will to overcome difficulties. As the text suggests, the adversities they encountered came in many forms. If we group them into the four basic aspects of life—clothing, food, shelter, and travel—we can more clearly understand the kinds of struggles they faced.

	Adversities	<i>I Ching</i>
Clothing	Purple knee bands	(Nine in the fifth place), 'Oppression at the hands of the man with the purple knee bands.'
Food	Meat and drink	(Nine in the second place), 'One is oppressed while at meat and drink.'
Shelter	Thorns	(Six at the top), 'He is oppressed by creeping thorns.'
Travel	Bare tree, gloomy valley, stone, thorns, thistles and golden carriage	(Six at the beginning), 'One sits oppressed under a bare tree and strays into a gloomy valley.' (Six in the third), 'A man permits himself to be oppressed by stone, and leans on thorns and thistles.' (Nine in the fourth), 'He comes very quietly, oppressed in a golden

		carriage.’
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B: This table gives a general summary of the adversities described in the *Kun* Hexagram. Things such as tangled thorns symbolize the difficulties faced by the superior man. Interestingly, this idea is very close to what psychology today calls ‘resilience.’

Resilience is usually defined by two key elements: first, adversity; and second, positive adaptation. In this context, the adversities shown in the hexagram represent the first condition. As for how to achieve positive adaptation, I have drawn on the commentaries of the *Judgment* and *Image* sections of the *Kun* Hexagram, and from them I summarize two practical ways of adjustment. These may serve as lessons and inspiration for today’s leaders.

A:

4. The Positive Adaptation in the *Kun* Hexagram

i. Accepting Destiny and Practicing Self-cultivation

In the *Image* on the *Kun* Hexagram, it is written:

There is no water in the lake: The image of exhaustion. Thus the superior man stakes his life on following his well. This symbolizes that in such times there is nothing a man can do but acquiesce in his fate and remain true to himself.

In the *Imperial Lectures on the I Ching* from the Qing dynasty, it is explained like this, ‘In ordinary times, the superior man cultivates himself and waits for the right moment. In this case, destiny is in his own hands. But in times of great change, he acts with rightness, even at the cost of his life.’ The key point is that in daily life, one should always prepare through self-cultivation. If a person has a clear mind and firm principles, then when sudden changes arrive, he will not be confused. Instead, he can face the challenge, break through adversity, and still achieve his purpose.

So, when we apply the teaching of the *Kun* Hexagram to the psychological idea of positive adaptation, I summarize it in this way. We must distinguish between ordinary times and times of adversity. In ordinary times, we should focus on building virtue, cultivating ourselves, and preparing for the future. Then, when adversity comes—when destiny is controlled by forces beyond us—we can remain calm and unafraid. This is why, in the Qing dynasty *Imperial Lectures on the I Ching*, the education of princes emphasized daily practice in ordinary life. By storing up knowledge and nurturing virtue in peaceful times, they would have the inner strength to break through difficulties when adversity arrived.

B:

ii. Speak carefully

When people face adversity, they often feel an urgent desire to escape. Because of this impatience, they may speak in a harsh or extreme way. But such impulsive words do not help. Instead, they can make the situation even worse. Therefore, if we want to overcome adversity, we must be very careful with our speech. As the *Kun* Hexagram says:

When one has something to say, it is not believed.

In the *Imperial Lectures on the I Ching*, it is explained, ‘In times of adversity, what we should value is silence and self-reflection. Even if the body is trapped, the mind and purpose remain free. But if the mind becomes restless, eager to defend itself with clever words, it only creates resentment in others and makes the hardship even worse. Is this not something to be cautious about?’ In other words, when facing adversity, one should speak less and reflect more. By doing so, the situation may be hard, but one’s inner goal will not be disturbed. On the other hand, if we try to argue and justify ourselves too much, we may deepen the crisis instead of escaping it.

Applied to psychology, this reflects the idea of positive adaptation. In adversity, adaptation does not depend on outward arguments or self-defence, but on inner cultivation and adjustment. Through silence and self-reflection, hardship can be transformed and eventually overcome.

A:

5. Conclusion

In *The Doctrine of The Mean* says, ‘In a position of wealth and honour, he does what is proper to a position of wealth and honour. In a poor and low position, he does what is proper to a poor and low position. Situated among barbarous tribes, he does what is proper to a situation among barbarous tribes. In a position of sorrow and difficulty, he does what is proper to a position of sorrow and difficulty. The superior can find himself in no situation in which he is not himself.’

This ability to adapt well to any environment and remain calm is an ideal in Confucian thought. In our study of the *Kun* Hexagram, we also explored how to overcome hardship, and we summarized two lessons for leaders today.

B:

1. Knowing destiny and cultivating oneself: Leaders should clearly distinguish between ordinary times and times of adversity. In ordinary times, they must focus on building virtue, character, and knowledge, so that their principles and judgment are firm. Then, when circumstances suddenly change and fate is no longer in their control, they can face it calmly and without fear. In this way, they uphold rightness and break through difficulty. This reminds us that true strength in leadership comes from daily preparation, not from quick fixes in moments of adversity.

2. Prudent speech and conduct: In adversity, the most common mistake is to defend oneself too quickly with words. But the *Kun* Hexagram warns ‘speak carefully’. In times of adversity, leaders should speak less and reflect more, using their energy for self-adjustment rather than outward argument. By keeping silence and practicing self-reflection, they avoid making enemies, preserve their vision, and create the chance to turn hardship into opportunity.

From Hardship to Strength: The *Kun* Hexagram's Teachings

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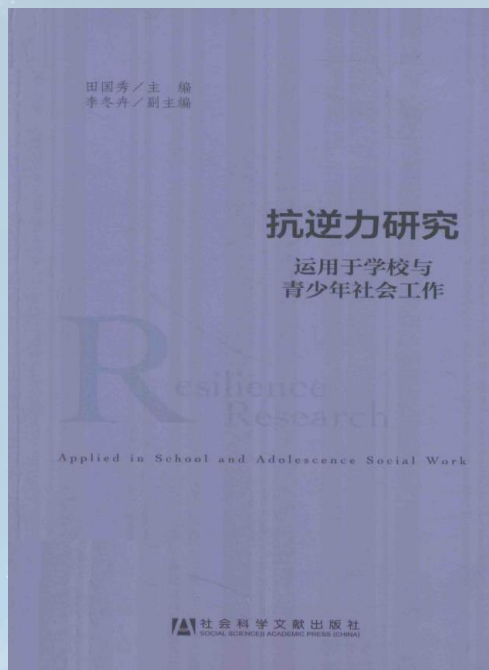
IV. The Positive Adaptation in the *Kun* Hexagram

V. Conclusion



I . The Definition of Resilience





Zeng Jing said, ‘Resilience, as a term in physics, originally refers to elasticity or elastic force, which is the force that enables an object to return to its original shape after the external force causing its deformation is removed.’¹

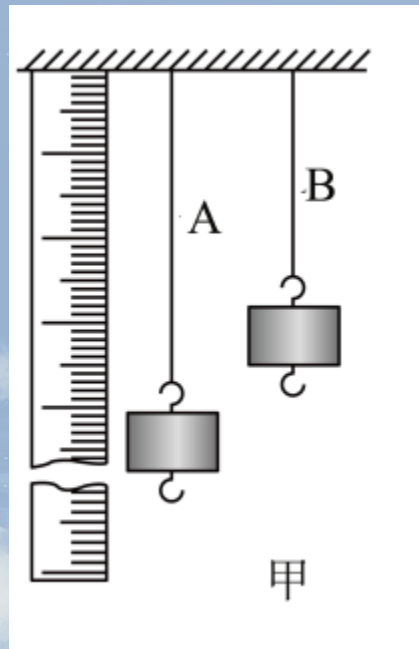
(Zeng Jing, 2013)





Robert Hooke (1635—1703)

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<https://img.xkw.com/dksih/QBM/editorImg/2023/3/6/5e4fde16-75cd-433a-806e-24e606def151.png?resizew=667>



In the 1980s ‘Resilience’ Physics ➡ Psychology

抗逆力理论的缘起与核心观点

曾 静

在积极心理学思潮的影响下，心理学、社会学的研究焦点逐步从关注问题转移到关注人们内在优势，强调人在面对压力、挫折时的潜能激发和自我超越。由此，抗逆力研究脱颖而出，并成为国际范围内社会学、心理学、社会工作领域的研究热点。了解抗逆力理论的缘起及其核心观点，对抗逆力在实际过程中的应用和实践具有重要的指导意义。

一 抗逆力 (resilience) 研究：从自然科学到社会科学

抗逆力作为一个物理学术语，其原意是弹力、弹性，是指物体受外力作用发生形变后，若撤去外力，物体能回复原来形状的力。简而言之，就是指某个物体能在弯曲、伸展或收缩后回复原先的形状或位置的性能。

物体在力的作用下发生的形状或体积的改变叫作形变。形变的种类包括很多，比如纵向形变、体积形变、切变、扭转以及弯曲等。不仅塑料、弹簧等能够发生形变，任何物体都能够发生形变，不发生形变的物体是不存在的。因物体的形变有多种多样，所以产生的弹力也有各种不同的形式。例如，一重物放在塑料板上，被压弯的塑料要恢复原状，产生向上的弹力，这就是它对重物的支持力。将一物体挂在弹簧上，物体把弹簧拉长，被拉长的弹簧要恢复原状，产生向上的弹力，这就是它对物体的拉力。

英国科学家胡克 1678 年就提出了著名的弹性定律（也叫胡克

‘Resilience refers to a person’s
psychological adjustment and **positive coping abilities** when facing adversities such as difficulties, pressure, and setbacks.

Even to a more ideal psychological state





Being unyielding in the face of difficulties

Striving positively for progress

‘A benevolent person first endures hardships and then gains rewards; such a person can be called benevolent.’

Analects 6.20

‘A virtuous person pursues the Dao rather than material sustenance.’

Analects 15.31

II. Resilience in the *Kun* Hexagram





King Wen of Zhou (BC. 1112—1050)

‘Awareness of adversity’

‘King Wen, the founder of the Zhou dynasty, was held captive by the last ruler of the Yin dynasty, the tyrant Chou Hsin. He is said to have composed the judgments on the different hexagrams during his captivity. Because of the danger of his situation, all these judgments emanate from a caution that is intent on remaining without blame and thus attains success.’

I Ching, underlying principles 2.11
(Trans. Wilhelm 1967, 353)

Engaged in self- reflection

Cultivate his characters

Enhance his virtue and conduct

Able to face good and ill fortune without fear

Remain composed amid in prosperity or adversity

Attain ‘ Without blame’



Nine Hexagrams of awareness of adversity

Confucius further selected nine hexagrams:

Lv (Conduct), Qian (Modesty), Fu (the Turing Point),
Heng (Duration), Sun (Reduction), Yi (Increase),
Kun (Oppression), Jing (Well), and Xun (Wind) .

I Ching, underlying principles 2.7
(Trans. Wilhelm 1967, 345-346)





Resilience

Discussions on the Kun Hexagram focus on interpreting how leaders break through adversity?

How they cultivate themselves in adversity and waiting for the right moment?

III. The Adversities in the *Kun* Hexagram



Understanding the *Kun* Hexagram

Referred to Wu Shoumin's article 'Explanation of the *Kun* Hexagram'

The *Kun* Hexagram primarily describes the journey of a superior man through three key phases:

- Seeking position
- Waiting for appointment
- Attending the appointment





The Warning

During a family ritual, he
learns danger awaits whether
he stays or leaves.
(Six at the beginning)

(Wu Shoumin, 2017)



A Reward

He had no choice but to remain
at home.

Unexpectedly, he received a
reward from his ruler.

(Nine in the second place)

(Wu Shoumin, 2017)



Grows impatient, sets out
alone

Falls into danger
(Six in the third place)

(Wu Shoumin, 2017)



No need for anxiety

The ruler's reward may seem
slow in coming, but will surely
arrive.

(Nine in the fourth place)

(Wu Shoumin, 2017)



Command for appointment
arrives

Puts on red robe of office.
Tripped by long fringes.
(Nine in the fifth place)

(Wu Shoumin, 2017)



Not serious obstacles

Thorns still tangle his steps.
Cut them away, move forward
with courage.
(Six at the top)

(Wu Shoumin, 2017)

	Adversities	<i>I Ching</i>
Clothing	Purple knee bands	‘Oppression at the hands of the man with the purple knee bands.’
Food	Meat and drink	‘One is oppressed while at meat and drink.’
Shelter	Bare tree, gloomy valley, stone, thorns, thistles and golden carriage	‘He is oppressed by creeping thorns.’
Travel	Bare tree, gloomy valley, stone, thorns, thistles and golden carriage	‘One sits oppressed under a bare tree and strays into a gloomy valley.’ ‘A man permits himself to be oppressed by stone, and leans on thorns and thistles.’ ‘He comes very quietly oppressed in a golden carriage.’

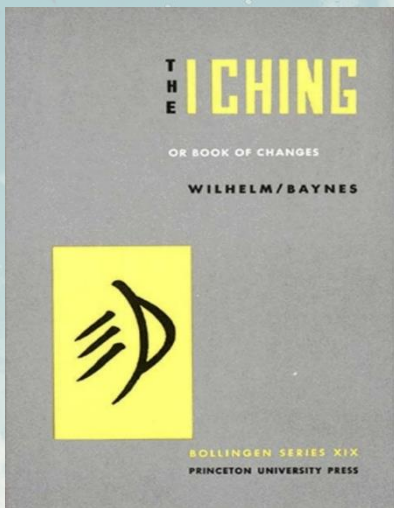
Two Elements of Resilience

Adversity

Represented by tangled thorns in the *Kun*
Hexagram

Positive adaptation

The superior man's response to
difficulties



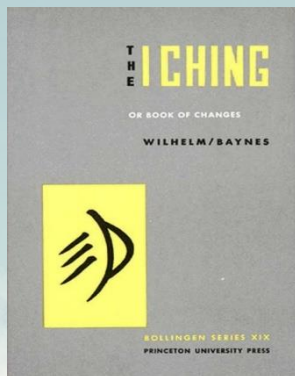
Commentaries of the *Judgment* and *Image*.
Summarizing two practical ways of adjustment.

IV. The Positive Adaptation in the *Kun* Hexagram

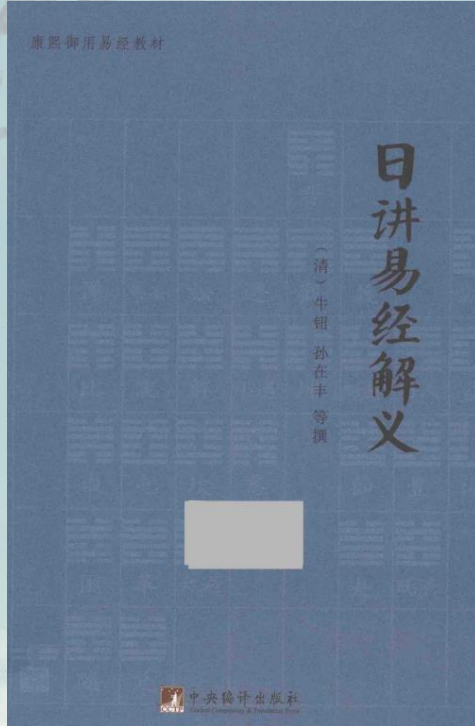


Accepting Destiny and Practicing Self-cultivation

There is no water in the lake: The image of exhaustion. Thus the superior man stakes his life on following his well. This symbolizes that in such times there is nothing a man can do but acquiesce in his fate and remain true to himself.



I Ching 47
(Trans. Wilhelm 1967, 182)



Imperial Lectures on the I Ching

‘In ordinary times, the superior man cultivates himself and waits for the right moment. In this case, destiny is in his own hands. But in times of great change, he acts with rightness, even at the cost of his life.’

Kun Hexagram to the psychological idea of positive adaptation

Ordinary
times

Build virtue, cultivate self,
prepare for future

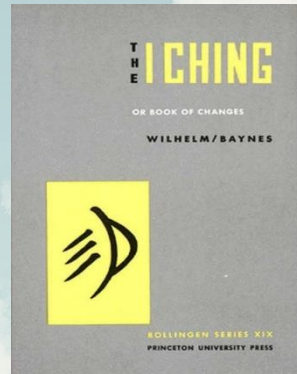
Times of
adversity

Remain calm and unafraid when
destiny is beyond control

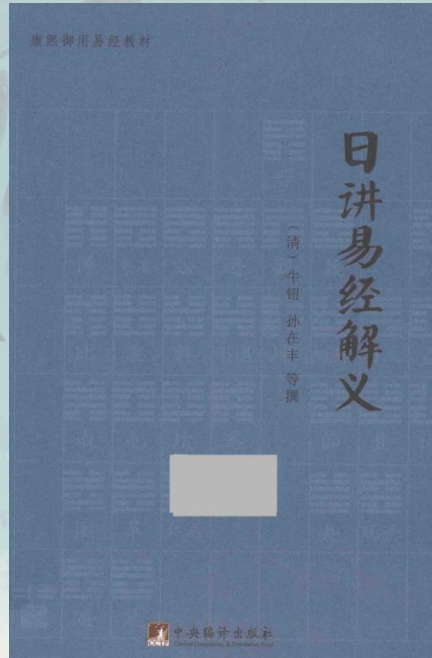
Speak carefully

‘When one has something to say, it is not believed.’

I Ching 47
(Trans. Wilhelm 1967, 181)



The Wisdom of Silence in Adversity



Imperial Lectures on the I Ching

‘In times of adversity, what we should value is silence and self-reflection. Even if the body is trapped, the mind and purpose remain free. But if the mind becomes restless, eager to defend itself with clever words, it only creates resentment in others and makes the hardship even worse. Is this not something to be cautious about?’

The Wisdom of Silence in Adversity

Inner Cultivation

Developing mental strength and clarity through quiet reflection

Positive Adaptation

Adjusting internal responses rather than external circumstances

Transformation

Converting adversity into wisdom and personal growth

V. Conclusion



From *The Doctrine of The Mean*:

In wealth and honour

Do what is proper to wealth and honour



In poor and low position

Do what is proper to poverty



Among barbarous tribes

Do what is proper to that situation



In sorrow and difficulty

Do what is proper to hardship

Recommendations

Knowing destiny and cultivating oneself

- Build in Ordinary Times
- Face Adversity Calmly

Prudent speech and conduct

- Reflect more, argue less
- Practice silence and self-reflection
- Speak carefully in adversity

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