



Pre-BA assignment feedback form

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<i>Module title: Ancient Chinese Morality and Ethics</i>	
<i>For completion by marker:</i>	
<i>Comments:</i>	
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SICH3001 Oral Presentation Script

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Good morning and good afternoon Respected Provost Master Shengmiao, Ms Deng and my fellow classmates. I am Loo Wen Hui. Today, I would like to share one of the teachings from *A Primary in the Three-Character Lines* 'Once Mencius's mother chose the best neighbourhood for her son.'¹

I will divide my presentation into four parts. Firstly, I will introduce the literary allusion of this teaching. Secondly, I will give a simple explanation about the main lesson which I have been learning from this teaching. The third session is to share the means that I carry out in my daily life and the final part is my conclusion.

According to *A Primary in the Three-Character Lines*, there is a sentence of 'Once Mencius's mother chose the best neighbourhood for her son.'¹ Mencius or we call him *Mengzi* 孟子 is a Chinese Confucian philosopher who is considered as 'second sage' aside from Confucius. Why could he obtain great achievement and always be praised by the offspring? One of the main factors was his mother, Meng Mu *Zhǎng Shi* 仉氏 who seriously cared a child's upbringing conditions.

Mencius's father had passed away since he was a child. Thus, his mother became the sole breadwinner and had to raise him by herself. At first, they lived by a cemetery, where his mother found him imitating the paid mourners in funeral processions. This kind of surrounding would not bring any good influences on his growth, so his mother

¹ Written by (宋) 王應麟 [Wang Yingling] and translated by 孟凡君 [Meng Fanjun], *大中華文庫：漢英對照 [Library of Chinese Classical Chinese-English]* (Beijing: Zhongyi chubanshe, November 2015) p. 9

decided to search for a new home. Unfortunately, the second accommodation was near a market where Mencius pretended that he was a merchant who always bargained with customers. Owing to this situation, his mother moved to another place as the environment would provide bad influences on Mencius too. After three moves, his mother finally settled down in an area where there was an academy of learning just around the corner. Inspired by the teachers and students, Mencius began learning day and night.

From this narrative, we would wonder why Mencius's mother had a strong desire to search for a proper environment for her son. In my opinion, a good living environment would provide good influences on humans since we are exposed to them every moment. During this process, we would unwittingly imitate the influences such as a person's thoughts, ways of speaking and behaving. Our thoughts will be gradually affected by the surrounding impacts and those impacts will finally become our personalities and traits. However, Venerable Master Chengde often educates us that according to *The Treatise on The Hundred Dharmas*, there are eleven wholesome dharmas and twenty-six primary and derivative vexations in our humans' thoughts.² As the old saying goes: 'We use three years to cultivate good virtue, but we just only need three days to learn a bad habit.' Indubitably, people would easily be affected by bad impacts instead of good influences.

As we know, having a positive personality and trait would grow a person into a pillar of society in the future. For example, people who obtain good characteristics

² Translated by the Chung Tai Translation Committee, *The Treatise on the Hundred Dharmas* 大乘百法明門論 (Taiwan: Chung Tai Chan Monastery, June 2008) p. 2

such as responsibility, honesty, punctuality would be accepted by others as they are self-disciplined. On the contrary, bad manners and attitudes will totally affect a person's growth as one will assume those bad influences as one's habits. Do you think these kinds of people will be able to get along well with others and attain good achievement? Consequently, good surrounding influence is vital for everyone in order to cultivate good attitudes and habits.

Other than that, living environment is also one of the main keys for a person to maintain a physical and mental health. According to *Water Knows the Answer*, there are some experiments proving that the magnetic field of the surrounding would affect a person's health. From the countless experiments, we could see that different kinds of surrounding influences may present different kinds of water crystals. Good condition environment will produce beautiful water crystals whereas a bad environment will produce ugly water crystals. Those good conditions are the power of love, purity, harmony and so on while abominable surroundings are the places which are hatred, pollution, and antagonism.³ In fact, there is almost seventy per cent of water in our body, so if we stay in a good condition which is full of appreciation, the water crystals in our body will be in beautiful shapes. On the other hand, if we stay in a bad condition, the water crystals in our body will form ugly shapes. Therefore, to have good physical and mental health, picking up good impacts in our daily lives is essential.

That's the reason why Mencius' mother played an important role in Mencius's

³ Purelandsg, *lianheguo Shuishiyan Yingpian (Zhongying Wenzhi – Gaoqingban)* [video] (21 October 2017) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dGU83KVEQI&t=1024s>> [accessed 1 October 2020]

accomplishment as to provide a proper environment for his studies. After discussing the importance of having a good living environment, we would ask how can we provide ourselves a good environment?

In my situation, first and foremost is to kowtow our ancients' as well as our parents' and teachers' teachings. Why do we need to listen to their advice? Since they have undergone some trials and tribulations, they possess a far-reaching view which could guide us to the right paths. Moreover, parents and teachers including our ancients are the people who always think of our benefits. They would utterly assist us to achieve a good future. Currently, I do not have the ability to judge the right and wrong when encountering problems. Thus, there is no doubt to accept their advice on a good environment.

In addition, choosing good friends is a crucial factor as they could often encourage me as well as point out my mistakes throughout my learning journey. *According to One Thousand-Character Classic*, 'Make friends agreeable disposition, carve polish admonition warning.', which means we should befriend noble characters' people as we could refine and exhort each other.⁴ Aside from parents and family members, friends will directly affect our thoughts and behaviours as we constantly keep in touch with each other. In *The Confucian Analects*, Confucius had set a principle of choosing friendships. Friendships with upright, sincere, and broad learning will bring advantages in our studies as they will help us in improving ourselves. Those people who are speciousness, affected sweetness and glib tongues

⁴ Written by (梁) 周興嗣 [Zhou Xingsi] and translated by 彭發勝 [Peng Fasheng], *大中華文庫: 漢英對照 [Library of Chinese Classical Chinese-English]* (Beijing: Zhongyi chubanshe, November 2015) p. 151

are injurious as they will only make us feel happy for a short while.⁵ In fact, they do not help us in our studies.

In conclusion, surrounding influence is a critical part of our lives as little by little, those influences will progressively cultivate a person's opinions. Furthermore, it will also gradually affect our physical and mental health. In a nutshell, I should listen to our ancients', parents', and teachers' teachings and befriend good friends, so that I am always exposed to good values, virtues, and habits in my daily life.

This is the end of my presentation today. Any comments or suggestions are appreciated. Thank you.

⁵ Written by (春秋) 孔子 [Confucius] and translated by James Legge, *The Confucian Analects* (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhouguji chubanshe, June 2016) p. 227

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