



Pre-BA assignment feedback form

(to be completed by marker)

<i>Student Name: Xinyu Zhang</i>	
<i>Module Code: SICH3003</i>	<i>Student number: 2016173</i>
<i>Module title: Introduction to the Four Books</i>	
<i>For completion by marker:</i>	
<i>Comments:</i>	
<i>Marker's signature:</i>	<i>Date:</i>
<i>Provisional mark:</i>	
NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the final examination board.	

Persist in reverence of Li 禮——Take Confucius as an example

Word count: 1547

Respected Provost, good afternoon. Miss Deng and Mr. Zhang, good morning.

Today, I would like to talk about one sentence from book 9, chapter 3 of *The Analects of Confucius*, which is, ‘Confucius said, “Mamian, liye. jinyechun, jian, wucongzhong. baixia, liye. jinbaihushang, taiye. suiweizhong, wucongxia.”’

I felt that I have always been very stubborn and cannot adapt to some conditions. I also felt very entangled in some of my own practices when I get along with others, and I do not know what is the right way. So when I heard the explanation from our lecturer in terms of this sentence, I admired the behaviour of Confucius very much. I want to understand the initial mind of Confucius through an in-depth study of this sentence, to reflect on myself and understand the true meaning of stubbornness and what we should be persisted in.

1. An explanation of the original text

(1) Original meaning

‘Mamian’ is the top hat made of hemp, but at the time of Confucius, the hat was usually made of ‘Chun’. ‘Chun’ is silk fabric. And the price of silk is more expensive than hemp, so the ‘Jian’ Confucius said here does not mean that its price is cheap, but it refers to its simple production process. Using hemp to make hats, the

handwork must be fine, which is very troublesome, but it's easier to make it with silk. Therefore, it is more economical to switch to 'Chun' compared to hemp. It is frugal, so Confucius switched to silk hats just like everyone else. So he said 'Wucongzhong'.

Next 'Baixia, liye', it means that sovereign is in the hall and according to etiquette, if courtiers want to visit the sovereign, they should bow in 'Tangxia', which means that before ascending the stairs¹. So it said 'Baixia'. And if sovereign says that they do not need to bow, then courtiers can go to the hall to bow. But at that time, some courtiers were very arrogant and disrespect sovereign. Regardless of whether sovereign asked them not need to bow or not, they would go directly to the court to bow. Therefore, this will lead to a trend that everyone does not bow before ascending the stairs. If someone does this according to the original etiquette, other people will think that it is against their meaning and feel he is not gregarious. But Confucius still 'Baixia', although it is different from everyone's practice, Confucius still did according to the original etiquette way.

(1) Extended meaning

This sentence talks about two things. The first one is that 'Mamian' changed to 'Chunmian'. It accords with frugality, and there is nothing wrong with it, so Confucius followed the crowd. Another thing is 'Baixia' changed to 'Baishang'. This is arrogant behaviour and has lost respect for sovereign. *The Canon of Family Reverence* said, 'The core of Li is reverence.'² If people lose respect when they bow to others, then bowing will become a formalistic gesture. Confucius does not approve of this, so he will not go along with it, but insist on bowing before ascending the stairs. This is the attitude of the sages in dealing with things.

Perhaps most people will think that 'Why would Confucius show these two different attitudes (which are conformity and nonconformity that we mentioned before) ?' In

¹ Edward Slingerland, *Confucius Analects*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), p.87.

² 黃得時 [Huang Deshi] : 孝經今註今釋 [*Xiaojing jinzhushishi*] (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1973), p.23.

fact, Confucius was according to the initial mind of people's practices to choose to follow crowd or not. 'Mamian' changed to 'Chunmian', which can improve the work efficiency of people making top hats, save a lot of manpower, and save people a lot of time to do other farming or work, which is beneficial to public and will not have too many bad effects. Also, it can enhance people's sense of frugality. On the other hand, 'Baixia' was changed to 'Baishang' because those courtiers who had lost respect for sovereign thought that bowing before ascending the stairs was unnecessary and sovereign could not see it anyway. So for themselves to be more relaxed, they changed the original etiquette. This was a change made for their selfish desires rather than for the consideration of the public like the former, so Confucius did not want to follow the crowd, but insisted on bowing before ascending the stairs to protect his respectful heart.

2. Related examples

(1) The example from The Analects of Confucius

Moreover, there is a story recorded in book 14, chapter 39 of *The Analects of Confucius*. There was a man who carried a straw basket criticized Confucius for stubbornly disobeying the general environment and making changes. So he persuaded Confucius that if there is no morality in the world, he should not be stubborn and just protect himself. However, Confucius was unmoved and still did not change his thoughts.

Although it was the age of darkness that all the ceremonies and rules sanctioned by the former kings were spurned, and those gifted or clever people chose to retire from the government and left cities for a secluded place to live. Confucius still believe that people could bring peace to the world instead of waiting for the time's coming. (人能弘道，非道弘人)³, and he firmly trust that he could be one of these people who would dedicate one's whole life to doing this great job even it was almost impossible to achieve.

³ 程樹德 [Cheng Shude], 論語集釋 [Lunyujiishi], (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2019.3), p. 1438.

Confucius faced difficulties with a positive attitude, rather than choosing a passive escape, regardless of it. It is because Confucius has a sense of responsibility for the country and the common people, and he is full of love for the world, so even if others do not understand him, he still insists on doing it.

(2) My own example

Mencius also said: ‘A superior man differs from others because he keeps something different in the heart. A superior man keeps in heart benevolence, and the proprieties as well.’⁴

So I was reflecting on my intentions when I was struggling with some things. For example, when I returned home from school last time, my previous junior high school classmates contacted me and wanted us to visit the teacher together.

So, I went to the teacher’s house with my classmates and cooked a meal for the teacher together. The teacher was very happy, and he also asked us to keep in touch in the future, because the friendship of seven years is very rare. After visiting the teacher, my classmates invited me to play ‘Script Murder’ together, but when I realized that it was not good for our body and mind, I did not want to join them. And I think that my parents certainly did not want me to go, so even though my classmates repeatedly invited me, I did not join them. But after I got home, I was very entangled whether I was too stubborn. Because we had been apart for four years and it was rare to get together. I also wanted to stay with them.

But after learning the examples of when Confucius followed crowd or not and felt the sages’ initial mind in dealing with things, I no longer feel entangled. Because following the classmates to visit the teacher, it is to express gratitude to the teacher, but also to reassure him, and let him know I am fine now, there is no need to worry about me. I did not go to ‘Script Murder’ with my classmates in order to prevent being polluted by bad things, and also to follow the teachings of Dizigui, ‘Keep

⁴ 吳國珍 [Wu Guozhen], *A new annotated English version of The Works of Mencius*, (Fuzhou: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 2015.11), p.197.

away from rowdy places. Do not be curious about things that are bad or unusual.⁵ Do not read books that are untruthful or immoral, for these will block our wisdom and undermine our aspirations.’⁶ This is also to give parents and teachers peace of mind. And I struggled because my faith in the teachings of sages was not firm enough, and I couldn't understand the temptation correctly and clearly. Just like The Doctrine of the Mean said: ‘He who attains to sincerity, is he who chooses what is good, and firmly holds it fast.’⁷ The stubbornness of the sages depends on whether it is moral or not. If it is moral and does not have any evil, then they will obey it. Otherwise, they will never be the same as the secular.

3. Conclusion

So this also made me understand that we have learned the teachings of the sages We should be able to distinguish the situations we encounter. When we speak and do things, we can not follow our thoughts and habits. So, this stubbornness is not the same as what we know now. We should consider it from two points. The first one is : when sages encounter a ceremonial practice, they will learn to imitate and persist in doing this; And another one is : When sages encounter an unruly practice, they will stick to their principles on etiquette and will not obey them to do wrong things. This is the true meaning of stubbornness. Therefore, Confucius seems to be stubborn, but he is actually sticking to his initial mind.

In conclusion, we should take Confucius as an example, not only persist in reverence of Li but also follow the principles of goodness when we encounter all people and things.

⁵ 王應麟 [Wang Yinglin], 三字經 [Sanzijing], in 聖學根之根 • 第一冊 [Shengxuegenzhigen • diyice], (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 2015.11), p. 23.

⁶ 王應麟 [Wang Yinglin], 三字經 [Sanzijing], in 聖學根之根 • 第一冊 [Shengxuegenzhigen • diyice], (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 2015.11), p.30.

⁷ James Legge (trans. & intro.), *The Chinese Classics* (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010), vol I, 413.

Bibliography

1. Slingerland Edward, *Confucius Analects*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003)
2. Legge James (trans. & intro.), *The Chinese Classics*, (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010)
3. 程樹德 [Cheng Shude], 論語集釋 [*Lunyujishi*], (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2019.3)
4. 黃得時 [Huang Deshi] : 孝經今註今釋 [*Xiaojing jinzhu jinshi*], (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1973)
5. 吳國珍 [Wu Guozhen], *A new annotated English version of The Works of Mencius*, (Fuzhou: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe)
6. 王應麟 [Wang Yinglin], 三字經 [*Sanzijing*], in 聖學根之根·第一冊 [*Shengxuegenzhigen·diyice*], (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 2015.11)