



Undergraduate assignment feedback form

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<i>Module Code: SIC4003</i>	<i>Student number: 1804022</i>
<i>Module title: An introduction to the Confucian Analects and the Book of Mencius</i>	
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Five Virtues of Ancient Chinese Sages Revealed in a Sentence from the Analects

Word Count: 1258

Respected provost and Miss Deng, my name is Guan Wenyuan, the topic of my presentation is, ‘Five Virtues of Ancient Chinese Sages Revealed in a Sentence from the Analects’.

The presentation will be divided into three parts. Firstly, I will explain the meaning of a sentence that I chose from the Analects. Secondly, I will tell an ancient story that reflects this sentence. Thirdly, I will talk about my views on that story and the five virtues of ancient Chinese sages.

Meaning of a Sentence from the Analects

The sentence I chose comes from the tenth chapter of *The Analects-Xue Er* :

Zi Qin asked Zi Gong, saying, ‘How was it that whenever our master came into a country he was always informed of the actual state and policy of its government? Did he seek for the information or was it given to him?’; Our master,’ replied Zi Gong, ‘was temperate, virtuous, courteous, frugal and humble; therefore, he could obtain what information he wanted. Our master’s way of obtaining information is different from other people’s ways.’¹

¹ Trans. by myself with reference to Ku Hung-Ming 辜鴻銘, Collection of Ku Hung-Ming: *The Discourses and Sayings of Confucius* 辜鴻銘文集：英譯《論語》 (Hainan: Hainan Publishing House, 2000), p.350.

子禽問於子貢曰：夫子至於是邦也，必聞其政；求之與，抑與之與。子貢曰：夫子溫、良、恭、儉、讓以得之；夫子之求之也，其諸異乎人之求之與。²

Zheng Xuan's comment was: 'Zi Qin is Chen Kang, a disciple of Confucius. Zi Gong, whose surname is Duan Mu, Si is his given name.'³ Zi Qin did not trust Confucius enough, so he had a lot of doubts. Zi Gong used Confucius' five virtues to answer his question. *Wen* 溫 means to have a peaceful temperament, and we should not show a stern look to others. As stated in *The Analects-Zi Zhang*, 'looked at from a distance, he appears solemn; when approached, he is mild'⁴. This is not to pretend, but after a long period of self-cultivation, one's inner sincere is naturally revealed on the behaviour. *Wen* also has the meaning of simple and honest, mean people are with the temperament of cunning rather than kindness. *Liang* 良 means goodness. Confucian teachings regard goodness as the best word. For example, *The Analects* mentioned that the music of Zhou Wuwang was 'perfectly beautiful, but not perfectly good'⁵. Goodness means not hindering all living beings. *Gong* 恭 means respectful. Respect arises from within and manifests itself in behaviour. *Jian* 儉 means frugality and not extravagant. Everything you do should stop as soon as it exceeds a certain limit. Overdoing anything is not good, nor is doing too little. *Rang* 讓 means to be humble and show respect to others. Confucius's noble characters made people believe in him enough and get moved by him. Confucius's obtaining is different from other people's seeking. Cheng Shude stated that,

² He Yan 何晏, *Thirteen Classics Explanatory Notes and Commentaries: Lunyu Zhushu* 十三經註疏：论语注疏 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2000), p.10. Trans. by myself.

³ Cheng Shude 程樹德, *Lunyu Jishi* 論語集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2018) p.51. Trans. by myself.

⁴ He Yan 何晏, *Thirteen Classics Explanatory Notes and Commentaries: Lunyu Zhushu* 十三經註疏：论语注疏 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2000), p.293. Trans. by myself.

⁵ He Yan 何晏, *Thirteen Classics Explanatory Notes and Commentaries: Lunyu Zhushu* 十三經註疏：论语注疏 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2000), p.49. Trans. by myself.

‘Qi Zhu is a term used in the states of Qi and Lu at the time.’⁶ *Zhu* 諸 represents the preposition 'at'. Confucius can get to know the actual states and policies of those governments, depends on the five virtues.

An Ancient Story

Next, let's take a look at a historical story, which is from Chunqiu Gongyangzhuan.⁷ The title is ‘The People of Song and Chu Gained Peace’. The story took place in the summer of the fifth year of the reign of Zhuang Gong. Zhuang Gong gave an order to attack the Song State. Now the army has only seven days' provisions and straw. If Song is still not captured, there will be no more food. They would have no choice but to retreat and return. But at this time, Sima Zifan, the general of the Chu army, climbed the mound built during the ancient siege to check the situation in Song City. And Hua Yuan, the general of the Song Army, also came out. So Sima asked, ‘How is your country?’ ‘Very tired,’ Hua Yuan replied, ‘the people in the city have reached the point where they exchange their children to eat’. When Sima heard this, he said, ‘Oh, this is really very tired. But with our opposing position, why did you tell me this situation in your country?’ Hua Yuan said: ‘When a person of noble character sees others in distress, he will pity and sympathize with him. The villain rejoices when he sees the misfortune of others. I see that you are a noble man, so I told you what happened.’ Sima said, ‘I see, let's work hard together. I'll tell you the truth, our army only has provisions and straw for seven days. If we still can't take the city, we must retreat and return.’ After saying this, they bowed to each other and left.

⁶ Cheng Shude 程樹德, *Lunyu Jishi* 論語集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2018) p.52. Trans. by myself.

⁷ Gongyang Shou 公羊壽, *Thirteen Classics Explanatory Notes and Commentaries: Chunqiu Gongyangzhuan Zhushu* 十三經註疏: 春秋公羊傳註疏 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2000), p.412-413. Trans. by myself.

Sima Zifan went back to see Zhuang Gong. Zhuang Gong asked, 'How is it?' Sima replied, 'Too tired. The people there have reached the point where they exchange children to eat.' Zhuang Gong said, 'Oh, it really is. If this is the case, we go and capture it now, and then we will return in triumph.' Sima replied, 'You can't attack anymore. I also told him there are only seven days of food in our army.' Zhuang Gong said angrily, 'I want you to see the situation. How can you tell him about our affairs?' Sima replied, 'Such a small state as Song still has such a minister who tells the truth. Isn't it reasonable for such a big state as Chu to have a minister who does not deceive? Therefore, I told him about it.' Zhuang Gong said, 'Well. Even though it is so, let's take it.' Sima replied, 'If this is the case, then monarch you can stay here and I will go back.' Zhuang Gong said, 'Who will stay with me after you leave? Who will lead the soldiers to fight? I will go back together.' Then they all went back. A battle was thus pacified.

My Point of View

In the last part, I will talk about my views on the story and the five virtues of Confucius. Hua Yuan and Sima Zifan are both very wise people. For Hua Yuan, he saw the situation and was able to seize the opportunity to quell the war. On the other hand, he was wise enough to know that Sima Zifan was a person of noble character. Sima felt Hua Yuan's sincerity, so he honestly gave him feedback. Both of them regarded the people of the world as more important than themselves, so that they had the courage to be honest with each other.

With their outstanding virtues, they successfully resolved the war and stopped the disaster among people. This story verifies what *The Analects* says: Being temperate,

virtuous, courteous, frugal and humble, you don't need to seek anything, and people will naturally be honest with you.

The five virtues expressed by Confucius are convenient for us to improve our own morality and behaviour. We have a reference when we want to learn from the sages. We can start from these five virtues and correct our inconsistencies accordingly. We demand ourselves with these five virtues, which is also a form of observing the rules. Trying to achieve these standards, we are doing good deeds. If we persist in this way in the long run, we can also become sages.

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

Bibliography

Books (Chinese)

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