

An Inspiration Given by the Relationship Between Family and Nation

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Respected Provost and Ms Deng, good afternoon! My name is Wang Xinyu, The topic I would like to share today is an inspiration given by the relationship between family and nation.

My presentation will be divided into four parts. The first part is introduction. The second part is the interpretation of this sentence. The third part is the importance and influence of family traditions and the final part is the conclusion.

I. Introduction

The great learning was an extremely important book in ancient times and it was basically a must-read for every scholar. Chengyi 程頤 who is famous scholar in the Northern Song dynasty also commented that *The great leaning* is the basic book for beginners to cultivate their virtues. It can be seen from the sentence we are going to talk about today that in traditional Chinese culture and ideology, family and nation are closely related and inseparable. Since a country is made up of millions of families, so family traditions absolutely can influence the trend of a country. In other words, whether the family tradition is good or bad will directly determine the prosperity or decline of a country. Because of this close connection between the two that the feeling of "family, country and the world" is deeply rooted in every Chinese mind.

II. The interpretation of text

First of all, let us look at the original text, ‘When there is kindness and humanity in one family, the whole nation will grow kind and humane. When there is courtesy and politeness in one family, the whole nation will all become polite and courteous. The ambition and perversity of one man, on the other hand, may bring to confusion and anarchy the whole nation. Such is the power of influence. Hence the saying: “One word can ruin everything;

one man can save a nation.”¹ This sentence is from *The great leaning*(大學) and it explains a principle of governing a country. From this sentence, it can be known that for monarch, if they want to govern their countries well, they should put their own families in order first. As a monarch, if he can regulate his families very well, cultivate himself with morality and treat others with humanity. Then he can serve as an example when he govern the country. So that the people of the whole country will follow him. As mentioned in *The Analects of Confucius*, ‘The moral power of the rulers is as the wind, and that of the people is as the grass. Whithersoever the wind blows, the grass is sure to bend.’ If the monarch and his family can take humanity as their rule of life, then the people of the whole country will follow their example and cultivate themselves with humanity. In this way, the wind of humanity will prevail in whole country. This is the power of example. Moreover, a exemplary monarch is not that temporarily pretends to be humane, courteous and cordial while he governs the country. But it is that he has been practicing these qualities in his own family for a long time, and these qualities have become his habit and character traits. The emperor Shun in ancient times set a good example. Shun is not only a legendary ancient emperor, but also a filial son and his experience ranks the first among 24 filial stories. Although his parents and younger brother treated him very badly, Shun didn't resent them and was still filial towards his father and loved his younger brother. It was because he had such good character at his family, he could inherit the throne from emperor Yao and govern this country with filial piety and humanity. Finally, all the people of his country were influence by Shun's virtue and to follow emperor Shun as example. *The great learning* also state another negative evidence. That is the last emperor Zhou in Shang dynasty. He is a famous tyrant in Chinese history. According to historical records, emperor Zhou was cruel and violent even brutalized loyal minister with torture. Because of his bad influence, the ministers around him also follow his example. Finally, the wind of violence prevails all over the country and the people follow their example. The final result is that the dynasty ended in chaos. So it can be seen from this two different instance that a person can make a country prosperous, and also can make a country destroyed. Although what *the great learning* stated here is about the principle of the governing country in ancient times, in today's society, it is also suitable for modern people. Because no matter what kind of work we do or what position we are in, everyone have an influence on their relatives, friends and people around them. So,

¹ Gu Hongming 辜鴻銘, *English Translation of Classics by Gu Hongming: Higher Education, The Universal Order or Conduct of Life* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2017), p. 32-34.

it is better for people to cultivate good habits, personal traits and bring positive effects to others.

III. The importance and influence of family traditions

We may want to know, how did people form such different personal traits. This is related to family traditions. In fact, family traditions can have influence on people's whole life. So, what is the family tradition. To put it simply, family tradition is like the main melody of a family. It is a kind of cultural and moral atmosphere formed by a family for a long time. It has infectious power and is the concrete manifestation of family ethics and family virtues. What kind of family tradition there is, there are what kinds of personal traits and principles of life. The family traditions can be passed down from generation to generation. To make a example, Zeng Guofan, a famous minister in the late Qing Dynasty, not only had remarkable achievements in politics and military affairs, but also excelled in the construction of family traditions. Although Zeng Guofan is always busy with his work all year round, but he still has a high sense of responsibility towards his family and never slackens his efforts in educating his children. During his lifetime, he wrote nearly 1500 letters to his family, most of which convey the concept of filial piety, fraternity, diligence and frugality to his children and these concepts are also the core of the Zeng's family tradition. Under the influence of this excellent family traditions, a lot of talents in different fields who have a profound impact on the society even the country emerged from his descendants. Family is the social cell and basic unit of society. No matter the leaders at all levels of government, or people from all walks of life in society, they all come from an independent family. So family traditions and upbringing can directly affect the formation of people's character and the quality of their personal traits will determine what influence they bring to the society and the country. So, as for the good trend and development of nation, it is important and necessary to encourage the construction of good and positive family traditions.

IV. Conclusion

From the text of *the great learning*, it can be seen that the construction of family traditions has a strong influence on the nation. If every family is filled with the spirit of humanity and comity, then the country will be peaceful and prosperous. The formation and continuation of family traditions not only affect an individual's life, but also have influence on social atmosphere. Family tradition is not only the soul of every independent family, but also the

soul of a country. It is said in *Mengzi* that the foundation of a country is the family. Whether in the ancient times or in today's society, the family has always been a place for people to settle down. Since ancient times, Chinese ancestors have attached great importance to family construction and education. From People's Daily I knew that, at the 2015 spring festival group meeting, president Xi Jinping also pointed out that 'No matter how much the times have changed, no matter how much changes are in our life pattern, we must pay attention to family construction, family education, and family traditions.' . This further demonstrates the importance of building and cultivating a good family traditions.

Bibliography

Books (Chinese)

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