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How to get determination in *the Book of Rites: On Learning*

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Respected Venerable Shengmiao and my dear teacher, good morning. My name is Qixuan Zhou and I would like to share with you the topic on "How to get determination in *the Book of Rites: On Learning*". "The very first step of study is to get determination. Study without determination is like irrigation without planting its roots, and hard work would get no reward."¹As Wang Yangming's saying, nothing is more important than getting determination in study. The most sacred teacher, Master Confucius, also said, "In my fifteen I was determined to study."²Then he got achievements in the way of sages. It matches the words: "Without determination nothing could be done"³, and shows the importance of getting determination before study. However, the questions lie here: What should be the determination of a man of study? And how could the determination be achieved?

To get determination is to know what to do firstly. That is because in the field of study, the direction of determination is the ultimate goal of study. *On Learning* contains such words, "...Only by doing this can we educate people and change customs, so that those around can be convinced and those from far away will come. This is the way of the great learning."⁴This paragraph from which these words are picked out mainly elaborates on the small goals for each stage of study. And these words, as the summary of the paragraph, is the ultimate goal achieved by the study. It is also the standard that we can refer to in the direction of our determination.

The scriptures "... educate people and change customs", combined with *the Great Learning*'s beginning, "What the Great Learning teaches, is to illustrate illustrious virtue; to renovate the people; and to rest in the highest excellence"⁵, gave us two aspects of the ultimate goal of study. On one hand, "those around can be convinced and those from far away will come" and "to illustrate illustrious virtue" are the external expression of personal accomplishment, aimed at perfecting oneself. On the other hand, "educate people and change customs" and "to renovate the people" are aimed at changing the outside world.

Therefore, from the view of *On Learning*, the determination for a man of study has two key points: the first point is to develop virtue in nature, which is "to illustrate illustrious virtue", so that "those around can be convinced and those from far away will come"; the second point is to make the others develop their virtue under his help, which is "to renovate the people", and he could "educate people and change customs" eventually. Before making determination, these two points must be clarified, so that a clear rule of study would be established when determination is made, and working toward these two goals leads to the achievement of "to rest in the highest excellence".

¹ Wang Yangming 王陽明 *yangming xiansheng jiyao* 陽明先生集要 [Master Yangming Collection], (Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company), p312.

² Zhu Xi 朱熹 *sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集註 [The annotation of *the Four Books*], (Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company), p54.

³ Wang Yangming 王陽明 *yangming xiansheng jiyao* 陽明先生集要 [Master Yangming Collection], (Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company), p307.

⁴ Sun Xidan 孫希旦 *liji jijie* 禮記集解 [Collected annotations of *the Book of Rites*], (Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company), p959.

⁵ Zhu Xi 朱熹 *sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集註 [The annotation of *the Four Books*], (Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company), p3.

After the ultimate goal of study is clarified, to achieve the determination, man should be aware of the premise of study, which is also the condition of “determined of study”. *On Learning* said, “The son of a good smelter must learn to sew leather at first; the son of a good bow maker must learn to make utensils with bamboo sticks at first. When the pony starts to learn to draw the carriage, it follows the carriage instead of drawing it. People who understand these three principles will know how to study.”⁶It also mentioned, “The most virtuous person cannot be limited by a certain official position; the universal truth cannot be limited by explaining a specific thing; the most trustworthy person keeps his word without making a contract; the most punctual person is punctual without setting a time. If you understand these four principles, you will understand that study must start from the root.”⁷These two pieces of scripture show the condition of “determined of study”. It is the key point of getting determination in the path of study.

The True Meaning of Book of Rites said, “this paragraph discusses that a man of study learns while seeing, then his study would accomplish, and three metaphors are used to explain it.”⁸The first and the second are both about people who have been in a certain industry for generations. It could be seen that man determined to study should firstly have good surroundings for study. The son of a smelter could see smelting every day, the son of a good bow maker could see making bow every day, and a man of study needs to find suitable surroundings for study in order to maintain purity of his heart and mind, and to have the conditions to study with fellow learners. This is the first condition of “to be determined to study”.

Secondly, the first and the second metaphors also show the importance of learning by analogy. Smelting metals needs to know fire well, and making leather clothes also needs to bake the leather with fire. If a man is skilled in making leather clothes, he could know smelting by analogy. The same goes for making bows. That is to say, in the process of study, awareness and ability to learn by analogy are needed. Master Confucius said, “If I teach him one aspect, but he can't infer the other three aspects from it, I won't teach him anymore.” A man of study must have such ability, in order to gain a better understanding of the teachings of the ancient sages. This is the second condition of “to be determined to study”.

And the third metaphor, “when the pony starts to learn to draw the carriage, it follows the carriage”, is the expression of study step by step. If man let the pony draw the carriage directly, it will inevitably make the carriage unstable due to his strength is different to the others. However, if you let the pony follow the carriage and get used to it firstly, the pony could work better naturally. *The True Meaning of Book of Rites* noted, “it means that a man of study should firstly practice in little exercises, and work in his area after that. Study would accomplish easily in this way.”⁹And Sun Xidan said in his book, *Collected Notes of Book of Rites*, “All these three skills are gained by observing, practicing and training, instead of born with nature.”¹⁰Study should be done step by step in an orderly manner, and gradually morality and academic knowledge could be accomplished.

⁶ Sun Xidan 孫希旦 *liji jijie* 禮記集解 [Collected annotations of *the Book of Rites*], (Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company), p970.

⁷ Sun Xidan 孫希旦 *liji jijie* 禮記集解 [Collected annotations of *the Book of Rites*], (Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company), p972.

⁸ Kong Yinda 孔穎達 *liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 [The true meaning of *the Book of Rites*] (Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House), p1447.

⁹ Kong Yinda 孔穎達 *liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 [The true meaning of *the Book of Rites*] (Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House), p1447.

¹⁰ Sun Xidan 孫希旦 *liji jijie* 禮記集解 [Collected annotations of *the Book of Rites*], (Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company), p971.

People must not be greedy for meritorious progress. This is the third condition of "to be determined to study".

If the three metaphors are telling the methods of study from the external surroundings and the internal conditions, the subsequent scriptures tell the rules of study through four examples. "The most virtuous person cannot be limited by a certain official position; the universal truth cannot be limited by explaining a specific thing; the most trustworthy person keeps his word without making a contract; the most punctual person is punctual without setting a time."¹¹In the process of study, the first rule is "always practicing"¹². Fundamental practices might be boring, but they are the basement of study. After the practice gets to a certain level, however, man must be able to break out of the original framework. Especially in the field of interpersonal relationship, man should get directly to the root of things, instead of the inherent external environment. As the saying goes, "Those who grasp the root of things could also get the branch, but those who only seek for the branches could not get the root."¹³For example, as the scripture "the most virtuous person cannot be limited by a certain official position", with great virtue, man naturally could not be limited to a single position. For example, Confucius resigned from office then traveled around the world, taught people, and education from him benefited all. So we come to the idea that "who can be an official has the lowest level of study."¹⁴Therefore, a man of study should get his determination and grasp the fundament of study. This is the forth condition of "to be determined to study".

Therefore, if man wants to achieve the determination and goal of study, firstly he needs to start with the four conditions of "to be determined to study". He should make good surroundings of study externally, and internally, he needs to get the root of study, learn by analogy, and learn step by step as what he is taught, as "making study his fundament, and the virtue would meet no obstacles in educate people and change customs"¹⁵said by *The True Meaning of Book of Rites*. Then his determination of "educate people and change customs" could surely be achieved.

In conclusion, in *On Learning*, if a man is "determined to study", he should firstly make determination in the aspects of self and the world, and start with the four conditions and achieve them. Then, at last, he could realize his ambition, which is really changing the customs in a certain area at the same time when he develops his personality. This is the true meaning of study and determination.

¹¹ Sun Xidan 孫希旦 *liji jijie* 禮記集解 [Collected annotations of *the Book of Rites*], (Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company), p972.

¹² Sun Xidan 孫希旦 *liji jijie* 禮記集解 [Collected annotations of *the Book of Rites*], (Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company), p971.

¹³ Sun Xidan 孫希旦 *liji jijie* 禮記集解 [Collected annotations of *the Book of Rites*], (Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company), p971.

¹⁴ Sun Xidan 孫希旦 *liji jijie* 禮記集解 [Collected annotations of *the Book of Rites*], (Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company), p971.

¹⁵ Kong Yinda 孔穎達 *liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 [The true meaning of *the Book of Rites*] (Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House), p1447.

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