



Undergraduate assignment feedback form
(to be completed by marker)

<i>Student Name:</i> Jia Hui Wang	
<i>Module Code:</i> SICH4004	<i>Student number:</i> 2011806
<i>Module title:</i> An Introduction to the Great Learning and the Doctrines of the Mean	
<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.	

A Person's Cultivation Lies in the Correction of One's Mind

Introduction

Today, I will be presenting on the topic "A Person's Cultivation Lies in the Correction of One's Mind" 「修身在正其心」 from *The Great Learning*.

Why talk about "a person's cultivation lies in correcting one's mind"? Self-cultivation is very important. In *the Great Learning* it says: "From the Son of Heaven to the common person, for all alike, [self-cultivation] is the root."¹ Why does it not say "investigating things" 格物 is the root? Because for an average person, if you tell him to "investigate things", it is too abstract and difficult to understand. How does one explain "investigating things" to someone who has not studied the classics? Instead, if we tell him: do good deeds, have good intentions, and speak good words; at least this is very specific and understandable in terms of words and actions. Self-cultivation is the cultivation of words and actions. The same is true for children, for example, teaching them to speak politely is very specific. For ordinary people, if you tell them to "investigate things," they will not be able to understand. Therefore, starting from self-cultivation as an entry point is very important. This is the importance of self-cultivation. So how do we cultivate ourselves? In order to cultivate one's person, *the Great Learning* says that one first corrects one's mind. So to succeed in self-cultivation, one must first be able to correct one's own mind. Thus, "a person's cultivation lies in correcting one's mind."

Text Explanation

To understand this passage, let us first look at each of the characters to understand what they mean.

修 means to cultivate, and 身 means body, or person, specifically our own person. So 修身 means self-cultivation.

The character 正 has varying translations from different translators. James Legge used the word "to rectify,"² A. C. Muller used the term "to correct"³ while Robert Eno translated it as "to balance."⁴ 心 means heart or mind. In Mr Xu Xingmin's

¹ *The Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean: A Teaching Translation*, trans. by Robert Eno (2016) <<https://hdl.handle.net/2022/23422>> [accessed 20 May 2022], p. 12.

² *The Chinese Classics*, trans. by James Legge, 3rd edn, 5 vols (repr. Taipei: SMC Publishing, 2016), I: *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, and The Doctrine of the Mean*, p. 357.

³ *The Great Learning*, trans. by A Charles Muller (1992) <<http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/greatlearning.html>> [accessed 21 May 2022].

⁴ *The Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean: A Teaching Translation*, trans. by Robert Eno (2016) <<https://hdl.handle.net/2022/23422>> [accessed 20 May 2022], p. 11.

Lecture Notes, he explained 正心 as being fair and just, without selfishness, without being partial.⁵ So 正心, for which I will use the term “to correct one’s mind” means to take away selfishness in our hearts and have an equitable mind.

With a better understanding of the characters, we can better understand the text. First, where does one begin with self-cultivation? Self-cultivation begins from words and actions. We begin by what is outwardly, from our speaking and behaviours. From here, we establish a habit, such as saying good things when we speak, and doing good deeds when we act. So when we begin our cultivation with words and actions, we gradually internalise the (outwardly) behaviours. For children, the same applies, which is to give them specific guidelines for speech and actions. When a child says something that shouldn't be said, they should be corrected immediately. And where do they come from, these things that shouldn't be said? Some they have learned from friends and classmates, and some are they have learned directly from their parents. The answer to the question mainly lies with the child’s family. Self-cultivation should start from the two aspects: words and actions. When an argument arises in a family, it is because of none more than words and actions. There can be verbal disputes. And if it is serious, it may become a physical fight. Therefore, domestic violence can be verbal or physical, so again, the two aspects of words and actions. If there is physical action involved, then it becomes very serious, as this is physical violence. Even if there is no physical violence, verbal abuse is very common in many families. Some may not yet have reached the level of violence or abuse, but the words sound sarcastic or mocking or sound unpleasant. The harmonious atmosphere in a family is destroyed by these behaviours. If we cultivate ourselves starting from our words, our families would be much more harmonious. So what we need to cultivate in self-cultivation are words and actions.

In his *Lecture Notes*, Mr Xu Xingmin said: “Those wishing to cultivate themselves first correct their minds. They must be able to first correct their own minds. Correcting one’s mind, this mind here refers to the whole of a person, the mentality of the whole.”⁶ The “mind” here includes all of a person’s mentality, and when it says “first correct their minds” this mind must be fair and just and have no selfishness or partiality. To see whether the mind is correct or not, whether it is selfish or just, we look at whether one thinks for themselves and their own interests, in which case the mind is selfish and not correct.

⁵ Xu Xingmin 徐醒民, *Daxue Jiangji* 大學講記 [Lecture Notes on the Great Learning] <<https://www.mifang.org/r/dx/>> [accessed 20 May 2022], p. 12.

⁶ Xu Xingmin 徐醒民, *Daxue Jiangji* 大學講記 [Lecture Notes on the Great Learning] <<https://www.mifang.org/r/dx/>> [accessed 20 May 2022], p. 12.

The Great Learning later states: “Concerning the phrase, ‘refining one’s person lies in balancing one’s mind’: If one possesses anger and resentment one’s mind will not be fully balanced. If one is in fear one’s mind will not be balanced. If one takes pleasure in delights one’s mind will not be balanced. If one is anxious and fretful one’s mind will not be balanced. When the mind is not focused one does not see what one is looking at, hear what one is listening to, or know the taste of the food one eats. This is the meaning of the phrase, ‘refining one’s person lies in balancing one’s mind.’”⁷ At the beginning, it is referring to the scripture from before. This part is a commentary on the previous part and explains it in detail. The characters 忿 and 懣 together mean anger. Separately, 忿 means anger, and 懣 is generally explained here as anger or resentment. This character does not exist in *Shuowen Jiezi*, but the right side of the character 寔, also pronounced the same way, is explained as an obstacle or a hindrance. If a person encounters an obstacle, he will become angry or resentful. Therefore, it is interpreted as anger or resentment, which is an implied meaning. So, if one possesses anger and resentment one’s mind will not be correct. The same goes for fear, if one is in fear one’s mind cannot be correct. If one takes pleasure in delights means if there are things we take pleasure in or delight in, one’s mind cannot be correct, it cannot not be fair and equitable. And if we are worrisome and anxious, our minds will not be correct.

“When the mind is not focused one does not see what one is looking at, hear what one is listening to, or know the taste of the food one eats.” 心不在焉 means one’s mind is not on what one is doing, so the attention is not focused on the present. When one’s mind is not focused, all the things that one senses, sights, sounds, even the taste of food, cannot be perceived. We may be looking at something but because our mind is not focused on that, we cannot see it. We may be listening to something but because our attention is not on what we are listening to, we cannot hear it. Even with food, if our mind is not focused on our food, then even though we may be eating delicious delicacies, we will not taste the food in our mouth. This means that if a person’s mind is not focused on the present, on what one is doing, then none of what his mind sees, hears, or tastes, is correct. Thus, a person’s cultivation requires the correction of one’s mind.

Why do we need to cultivate ourselves and correct our minds? *The Great Learning* says, “From the Son of Heaven to the common person, for all alike, self-cultivation is the root.” The Son of Heaven in Chinese history is used to refer to the emperor. So from the emperor, the highest ruler of the empire, to the ministers in the imperial court, to the common person, for everyone, no matter your social status, self-

⁷ *The Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean: A Teaching Translation*, trans. by Robert Eno (2016) <<https://hdl.handle.net/2022/23422>> [accessed 20 May 2022], p. 15.

cultivation is the root. The character 壹 or one, is interpreted here as all, or everyone. For all, the root is self-cultivation. And why does it say that self-cultivation is the root, rather than “investigating things”? The character 本 here, which means root, is referring to the place to start, the entry point. Why should we start with self-cultivation? For ordinary people, people who have not studied the classics, the idea of “investigating things” is too abstract and too profound. Self-cultivation is very specific, and easy to understand. So, for ordinary people, especially for children, cultivation begins with words and actions. One should be given guidelines for how to speak and act. Thus self-cultivation is where we start, and it is the root.

For example, *Di Zi Gui*, or *Guidelines for Being a Good Person*, is a book of guidelines for everyone teaching us how to cultivate our words and actions. There is a teaching in *Di Zi Gui* that teaches us “when studying, our mind, eyes, and mouth must be focused on our learning.”⁸ When we study or read the classics, we are cultivating ourselves, and we must have a correct mind. As *Di Zi Gui* says, our mind must be focused. So, in self-cultivation, the mind must be correct. One’s words and actions show the state of one’s mind. The opposite is true, a person who has a correct mind will be cultivated in his speech and actions.

Conclusion

Going back to self-cultivation, what we need to cultivate in self-cultivation are words and actions. For all alike, self-cultivation is the root, so all people should start with self-cultivation. In order to cultivate oneself, one must first correct one’s mind, which is to have a just mentality, without selfishness. If there is anger, fear, joy, or worry, the mind cannot be correct. If the mind is correct, then the person can be cultivated. Hence, a person’s cultivation lies in correcting one’s mind. One’s words and actions show the state of one’s mind. A person who is cultivated in speech and actions has a correct mind. And vice versa, a person whose mind is correct will act and speak accordingly. The Venerable Master Chin Kung often says: 存好心 have good intentions (this is like having a correct mind), 說好話 speak good words, 行好事 do good things, (these are the two aspects of self-cultivation: words and actions) and finally: 做好人 be a good person. These four little phrases are easy to understand and remember and includes self-cultivation and correcting the mind. Having good intentions, speaking good words, doing good things, and being a good person.

This concludes my presentation. Thank you for listening. Any feedback and suggestions would be appreciated.

⁸ *Guidelines for Being a Good Person*, trans. by Pure Land Translation Team (Toowoomba: Pure Land College Press, 2009), p. 29.

Bibliography

Books

The Chinese Classics, trans. by James Legge, 3rd edn, 5 vols (repr. Taipei: SMC Publishing, 2016), I: *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, and The Doctrine of the Mean*

Guidelines for Being a Good Person, trans. by Pure Land Translation Team (Toowoomba: Pure Land College Press, 2009)

Internet

The Great Learning, trans. by A Charles Muller (1992) <<http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/greatlearning.html>> [accessed 21 May 2022]

The Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean: A Teaching Translation, trans. by Robert Eno (2016) <<https://hdl.handle.net/2022/23422>> [accessed 20 May 2022]

Xu Xingmin 徐醒民, *Daxue Jiangji* 大學講記 [Lecture Notes on the Great Learning] <<https://www.mifang.org/r/dx/>> [accessed 20 May 2022]