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Interpretations of 明明德 Ming mingde and 親民 Qinmin

1

Good afternoon Professor Wu and Good morning my classmates, today my topic is about the interpretations of two key terms in The Great Learning: 明明德 (Ming mingde) and 親民 (Qin min).

2

We will have three parts:

First, compare three different translations of the two terms.

Second, introduce the interpretations of the two terms by 朱熹 (Zhu Xi) and 王陽明 (Wang Yangming), compare the differences between them, and analyze the thinking they used in their interpretations.

Third, summarise the differences between Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming and give a conclusion.

3

Now we'll begin the first part, compare three different translations.

Firstly, let's look at 明明德 Ming mingde's translation.

In Legge's translation, 明明德 is translated as “to illustrate illustrious virtue.” According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the verb form of illustrate means “to show the meaning or truth of something more clearly.” It's an appropriate word, but it is not as suitable as the word manifest.

Mr. Wing-Tsit Chan translates 明明德 as “manifesting the clear character.” In the Oxford Dictionary, manifest something (in something) means to show something clearly, especially a feeling, an attitude, or a quality. 明德 is a kind of quality, so Mr. Chan used an appropriate verb—manifest, to mean “manifesting the clear character.” It's a suitable translation.

Mr. Johnston and Wang Ping—their translation of the first character ming in 明明德 is the same as Mr. Chan's, but they translate 明德 as “original brightness of innate virtue.” The phrase innate virtue is the closest to the meaning of Zhu Xi's interpretation of mingde, making their translation very fitting in that context.

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Now let's look at the translation of 親民 Qinmin.

Legge's translation is “to renovate the people.” Obviously, he used Zhu

Xi' s interpretation that 親民 should be understood as 新民.

Mr. Chen used the original meaning from the text of The Great Learning, translating 親民 as “loving the people.”

Mr. Johnston and Wang Ping' s translation is special. They translated 親民 as “it lies in restoring the original brightness of that virtue in the people generally.” This is close to Wang Yangming' s view in Daxuewen (大學問): “Manifesting the clear character consists in loving the people, and loving the people is the way to manifest the clear character.”

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Now we move on to the second part, the interpretations of the two terms by 朱熹 (Zhu Xi) and 王陽明 (Wang Yangming).

Let's look at Zhu xi 's interpretation of Ming Mingde,

Most of PowerPoint page is in the original text, I will present it by my summary.

In 四書章句集注, he explained that:

The first character 明 (ming) means "clearly manifesting." 明德 (mingde) refers to "luminous virtue," which a person receives from

Heaven. It is unobscured and contains all the principles of everything. We can find the right way to respond to anything from it. However, due to selfish desires, this **luminous** virtue can become **obscured**—though the brightness of virtue is never truly lost. We need to hold on to what **emerges** from it and **clarify** it, so we can restore it to its original condition.

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According to 朱子語類, Zhu xi believes that,

People naturally have luminous virtue. There are no children who do not know how to love their parents, and as they grow up, no one fails to know how to respect their elder siblings. This kind of virtue is innate but becomes obscured by selfish desires. Ming ming de means to manifest this virtue.

He gives an example:

a mirror is originally bright, but if it is **covered** by dust, it can no longer reflect anything. Once the dust is removed, the mirror becomes bright again.

From these view, we can see that Zhu Xi believes Mingde is part of human nature. Those who have not yet restored it are blocked by selfish desires, and restoring this nature is the meaning of ming mingde. Zhu Xi's interpretation is similar to the view in San Zi Jing (三字經): “People

have goodness nature naturally” (人之初，性本善).

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Now let's move on Wang Yangming's interpretation of Ming mingde.

According to the book of 傳習錄，compiled by his disciples, Wang Yangming said that,

From the extension of knowledge to the bringing of peace to the world, nothing is not related to manifesting the clear character, including loving the people (Qinmin). The clear character is the character of the mind—humanity. A man of humanity regards Heaven, Earth, and all things as one body. If anything loses its place, it means that humanity is not fully extended.

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In another text 《大學問》from 王陽明, it is recorded that，

Manifesting the clear character (Mingmingde) is to establish Heaven, Earth, and all things as one body. Loving the people (Qinmin) is to achieve the application of all things as one body.

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Here is an example about the clear character of filial piety used by Wang Yangming:

“We love our father, and love others fathers, and love all people’ s

fathers in the world. Then, my humanity will truly become one body with my father, others' fathers, and the fathers of all people in the world. When we achieve that, the clear character of filial piety will become manifested."

Wang Yangming's explanation is unlike Zhu Xi's. He interprets Mingde as humanity, as seeing all things as one body. All things (including loving the people) are also matters of manifesting the clear character.

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Next, let's look at the interpretations of Qinmin 親民,

Zhu Xi follows Master Cheng (程子)'s view: 親 (qin) means "to be kind," and should be 新 (xin), meaning "to renew."

Zhu Xi explained that to renew means to reform the old, manifesting self-bright virtue and extending it to help others reform the old pollution.

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But, Wang Yangming disagreed with Zhu Xi's interpretation. He thought that, according to The Great Learning's original text, 親 does not mean renovation; it means love. Loving the people expresses both the ideas of educating and feeding the people. If replaced by "renovate," it seems one-sided.

Wang Yangming gives some examples from The Great Learning, arguing that 親 refer to love rather than renovation.

“Rulers deemed worthy what they deemed worthy and loved what they loved, while the common people enjoyed what they enjoyed and benefited from their beneficial arrangements.” In the sentence, 親 (qin) means love.

“君子賢其賢而親其親，小人樂其樂而利其利”

Just like the feelings expressed in the other two sentences:

“Act as if you were watching over an **infant**”

“如保赤子”

And the ruler “likes what people like and dislikes what the people dislike.”

“民之所好好之，民之所惡惡之，此之謂民之父母”

Let's go to the last part now,

Summarise the differences between Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming and give a conclusion.

Even though Mingde and Qinmin are different, they cannot be divided into two unrelated matters. As Wang Yangming said, “ Manifesting the clear character consists in loving the people, and loving the people is the

way to manifest the clear character.”

The most significant difference between Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming’s interpretation of 明明德 is that Zhu Xi interpreted it from the perspective of principle. He explained what Mingmingde is, why we cannot restore it, and gave examples—like the dust on the mirror. He also said that when we restore our bright virtue, we gain the ability to respond to everything, because all principles are already included in our bright virtue.

Wang Yangming focuses on how mingmingde should be applied, and he explains what it is like when we fulfill and achieve manifested bright virtue. In Wang Yangming’s opinion, Mingmingde is humanity, and he explains it from many aspects, like filial piety. This makes the concept of Mingmingde more tangible and clear.

Regarding Qinmin, Zhu Xi’s explanation that 親 should be 新 (renovate) does not convince Wang Yangming. Zhu Xi uses “作新民” to support his point, but Wang Yangming does not accept this as evidence. He thinks that other chapters mentioning 親 in The Great Learning mean love rather than renovation, similar to the concept from Mencius:

“The superior man is affectionate to his parents and humane to all people.”

親親而仁民, And 親 includes two aspects: educating and feeding the people.

In Conclusion, although Wang Yangming's and Zhu Xi's ideas are different, they are not opposites. It is difficult to say who is right and who is wrong, and future generations can choose the interpretation that is more beneficial for themselves to learn.

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This is the end of my presentation, I'd love to hear any suggestions, thank you for listening.

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