



Pre-BA assignment feedback form

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<i>Module Code: SICH3004</i> <i>Module title: An introduction to the Governing of Ancient China 360</i>	<i>Student number: 2016173</i>
<i>For completion by marker:</i> <i>Comments:</i>	
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Humility is the foundation of all good deeds

Word count: 2570

There is an old saying goes, ‘Arrogance will bring disaster, and humility will bring good results’.¹ Humility is a very important attitude for our learning and living, so we ought to maintain this type of thoughts continuously. So I hope I can have a deeper understanding of the importance of humility through writing this essay. Moreover, I hope it can help me keep vigilant at all times so that I could observe my arrogant thoughts in the future study and life.

There are four parts in this essay. Firstly, I will briefly introduce the subject, humility. Secondly, I will talk about the importance of humility. Then, I will briefly analyse the reasons of having arrogant thoughts. The last part is the conclusion of this essay.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the subject - Humility

According to the book of Tuan Zhuan, the oracle of Humility (Qian) — ‘gets through’ — indicates ‘progress and success.’ In the way of heaven, to send down its beneficial influences below, where they are brilliantly displayed. In the way of earth, lying low, to send its influences upwards and (there) to act. It is the way of heaven to diminish the full and augment the humble. It is the way of earth to overthrow the full and replenish the humble. Spiritual Beings inflict calamity on the full and bless the humble. It is the way of persons to dislike the full and love the humble. Humility in a position of honor makes that still more brilliant; and in a low position its virtuous accomplishment is unsurpassable. This is the result attained by a superior person through the cultivation of moral character.²

¹ *The Governing Principles of Ancient China —Based on 360 passages excerpted from the original compilation of Qunshu Zhiyao*, 2nd edn ((M) Bhd: Chung Hua Cultural Education Centre), p. 146.

² *The Governing Principles of Ancient China —Based on 360 passages excerpted from the original compilation of Qunshu Zhiyao*, 2nd edn ((M) Bhd: Chung Hua Cultural Education Centre), p. 144.

This sentence is included in chapter three of *The Governing Principles of Ancient China*, Esteeming Virtues. Also, this is the first sentence in the chapter of humility. So I choose to use this sentence to introduce my subject.

This sentence's original text comes from *The Canon of Yee-Change*. It tells us the value of humility through introducing the principles of Heaven, Earth, Spiritual Beings and Persons. Therefore, only the modest and humble persons could obtain good luck and happy life. In addition, there will be good people to help them.

Chapter 2: The importance of humility

From ancient times to the present, many sages and the persons of virtue and talent have emphasized the importance of humility. I roughly group them into two aspects:

2.1 In terms of studying.

Venerable Master Yinguang once said that if we study with one percent respect, we will gain one percent of benefits, and if we study with ten percent respect, we will gain ten percent of benefits. According to this, we could know that more respectful we treat to our lecturers and classics, the more things we can learn. However, only if we are humble, we could have a respectful attitude. Because humility means that we could realize our own mistakes or where we are still lacking. Only a person who feels that he is still has a lot of worse could accept their lecturers' teachings humbly, and get benefits from that. Just like Mr. Yuan Liaofan of the Ming Dynasty said that if we are humble, we will be able to understand what our tutor teach us and we will be benefited endlessly.³

For example, great learners of the Northern Song Dynasty, Yang Shi and You Zuo. They waited for Cheng Yi, a famous teacher, in the heavy snow, because they wanted him to be their teacher. For even though the snow was very deep, they did not complain at all and did not leave until their teacher waked up. It is precisely

³ The Chinese text is '謙則受教有地，而取善無窮' 蔡禮旭 [Cai Lixu], *了凡四訓講記* [*Liaofan Sixun Jiangji*] (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 2014), p. 420.

because of such a humble and respectful attitude that they have become famous learners. Confucius also said:

Even when walking in a party of no more than three I can always be certain of learning from those I am with. There will be good qualities that I can select for imitation and bad ones that will teach me what requires correction in myself.⁴

Therefore, how much we can learn depends entirely on whether we have a humble attitude. In this regard, *Shancai Tongzi* 善財童子 is a good example for us. He thinks that he is the only student, and everyone other than him is his teacher. So we should learn from him and regard every living beings as our own teacher, Buddha and Bodhisattva. If we have this kind of humility, our arrogant thoughts can be completely quited.

2.2 In terms of Character Building.

Just like *Guidelines for Being a Good Person* says that if we are appreciative of criticism and uneasy with compliments, people who are virtuous, sincere and trustworthy will gradually become our friends.

When we faced with praise from others we would feel worried, but we can accept it very happy when faced with criticism, then kind people would be close to us. It will also help us to study better and correct our bad habits.

For example, when Emperor *Tang Taizong* 唐太宗 was in power, he was humbly accepting advice and actively listened to the opinions of his ministers. Even if there was a minister said something wrong, he did not explain or refute it, just in order to allow more people to dare to persuade him and form a good example for others. Therefore, the Tang Dynasty had the grand occasion of the ‘Governance during the Zhenguan Reign’ 貞觀之治. On the other hand, if we cannot correctly treat criticism and praise with humility and discreteness, we will not be able to receive the teachings of teachers who are beneficial to us, and we might even be immersed in pride and complacency and cannot extricate ourselves. If we cannot realize our own mistakes, we cannot correct them, and will waste this rare

⁴ 楊伯峻 [Yang Bojun] and 韋利 [Wei Li], *論語：漢英對照* [Lunyu Hanying Duizhao] (Chansha: Hunan Renmin Chubanshe, 1999), p. 71.

opportunity in this life.

So we can see how important humility is to our character building. As the proverb says, ‘humility makes one progress, and pride makes one regress’. A noble person in an honorable position can use his virtue to influence the people around him to become better without appearing arrogant and rude. For even though he has a humble status and does not have a high official position, his virtue can still educate people. A noble person can always maintain the cultivation of humility, and his humility will not be changed by having status, wealth and knowledge.

Chapter 3: Reasons for not being humble

Not being humble is arrogance. Venerable Chengde once said, ‘A person's arrogance is like a mountain. It seals his own heart, and the teachings of sages cannot enter’. It can be seen that arrogance is really harmful to us.

Futhermore, according to my own situation and with reference to the teachings of our lecturer, I have summarized three factors that cause us to be arrogant. I hope that I can often encourage and warn myself.

The first point, Venerable Chengde once said in class that when people think that they have some advantages over others, they will become arrogant. Qualifications, experience, appearance, figure, etc., can all become the origin of a person's arrogance. In *The Canon of Yee-Change*, it is says that after a person has worked hard, he does not boast about himself. He obviously has credit, but he does not think that he should be appreciated and praised by others. This performance is truly humble.⁵

Confucius also taught us: ‘If a man gifts as wonderful as those of the Duke of Zhou, yet is arrogant and mean, all the rest is of no account’.⁶ Therefore, once people become arrogant and proud, once they feel that they do better than others, it will do great damage to their own morality and learning.

I remember that when I was at home, one morning I got up at four o'clock for

⁵ The Chinese text is ‘勞而不伐,有功而不德,厚之至也.’ 郭建勳 [Guo Jianxun], *新譯易經讀本* [*Xinyi Yijing Duben*] (Beijing: Sanmin Shuju, 2006), p. 511.

⁶ 楊伯峻 [Yang Bojun] and 韋利 [Wei Li], *論語：漢英對照* [*Lunyu Hanying Duizhao*] (Chansha: Hunan Renmin Chubanshe, 1999), p. 83.

morning class. After washing up, I stood in the living room, turned on the light, and thought I woke up early, so I had arrogant thoughts. Then I went to the window, thinking that it should be pitch black outside, and no one got up yet. But when I walked in, I saw that there were many households with their lights on. After this lesson, I no longer dare to think that I got up earlier than others. When I wake up early, I will deliberately go to the window, look at the houses with lights on outside the window, and tell myself that there are so many people who wake up earlier than me and they work harder than me. I cannot have arrogant thoughts.

Just as Venerable Chengde often encourages us that we must beware of ‘have one progress but then regress a lot’. We should always take care of whether we think that we do better than others and whether we have the arrogant thoughts.

Meanwhile, the thought of gratitude is also an effective way for us to get rid of arrogant thoughts.

Venerable Chengde once said that nothing in the world is taken for granted. We should be grateful for air, water, sunlight and everything even a smile, and we should not take anything we have for granted. Moreover, we cannot repay the great kindness of heaven, earth, parents and teachers give to us. So how can we feel good about ourselves and how can we be arrogant?

The second point, as soon as we have the idea of comparing ourselves with others, we become arrogant. We can often see the faults of others and blame others for their mistakes, just because we do not think we have that faults. Venerable Master Chinkung taught us that even if others are wrong, it is right; and even if I am right, it is wrong. Because when we think that others are wrong, or we are right, we already have the thought of comparison. It is already arrogant that we think we are better than others or we are right and others are wrong.

For example, when I got home during this Chinese New Year, I found that I could easily see the faults of others. Last year, I often thought that some of the actions of others were wrong, and sometimes I even got angry and had a bad mood when I saw some of the things they did, even if it had no effect on me. But Venerable Chengde once taught us to be compassionate towards the faults of others. Because it is not his nature, it is because no one had taught him what the right thing is. It is unfortunate that he has not had the opportunity to receive correct teaching, so we are obliged to help and care for them. How can we look at their faults only and be angry

with them with arrogance?

Moreover, ‘all living beings are originally Buddhas’⁷, we ought to treat all people with equality, because our nature is the same, but it is temporarily blocked. As long as we keep this in mind, the bad habit of being arrogant can be combated.

Venerable Master Chinkung once said that the more virtuous a person is, the more modest he will be, and he will never be arrogant or inferior. If we compare our own virtues with those of sages or the persons of virtue and talent, we will feel ashamed. So if we want to compare, we should compare with sages, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. If we can have such an attitude, then want to correct our bad habits, we will feel that we do not have enough time to do it. So how can we be arrogant?

The last point: Stubbornness is also the origin of arrogance. Venerable Chengde said that when we are faced with a thing or when we face a person, we quickly follow our own thoughts and make judgments without considering them carefully, which is a reflection of arrogance. As the old saying goes: ‘After a scholar’s absence of three days, one will see in him a man changed for the better’. This also tells us that we should treat people and things with a developmental perspective and not be immersed in our own ideas.

For example, Xiang Yu, the overlord of the Xichu. Although he was not a monarch, Mr. Sima Qian listed him in the ‘Benji’ in *Records of the Historian*, which specially recorded the events of the emperor. This shows that Xiang Yu has a high possibility of becoming an emperor, but in the end he failed and ended his life by the river. He said that he failed because God did not want him to succeed, but his tactics. It could be seen that he believed that he was not at fault until dying, and always believed that the failure was not caused by himself. Therefore, it can be seen that not knowing how to reflect on our own problems and not knowing how to correct our mistakes is very harmful.

I also have a serious bad habit of being stubborn. I often do not reflect on my own problems. Because of this, I often conflict with others or cause others to be troubled. This is all caused by I only following my own thoughts and opinions, but

⁷ 淨空法師 [Venerable Master Chin Kung], *傳統文化如何學習* [Chuantong Wenhua Ruhe Xuexi], <<https://ft.amtb.cn/index.php>> [accessed 28 February 2022]

the teachings of the sages. In addition, Confucius is a good example for us to learn to be humble and let go of our arrogance. His words and deeds are all derived from the teachings of sages. 'Have transmitted what was taught to me without making up anything of my own. I have been faithful to and loved the Ancients'⁸. It is the principle of Confucius, and it also shows his modest and cautious attitude.

Venerable Master Chin Kung once said that when we learn Confucianism, we should learn from Confucius; when we learn Taoism, we should learn from Lao Tzu, and when we learn Buddhism, we should learn from Shakyamuni Buddha. Therefore, we ought to compare ourselves to them, and take sages, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as examples, then fight against our bad habits bravely.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Lao Tzu once said:

The reason why the rivers and seas are able to receive the homage and tribute of all the valley streams is that they are lower than all the others. It is thus that they are the kings of them all.⁹

As we have known that importance of humility and have realized our arrogant thoughts, so we should try our best to correct it. However, it is really not easy to correct mistakes. I also find that I have bad thoughts all the time, and arrogant thoughts emerge in endlessly throughout the day especially.

But Venerable Chengde once taught us that we should not give up because of difficulties, and we should not be discouraged because of having too many bad thoughts. We should be more courageous and diligent to improve and move towards goodness.

Confucius once sighed, 'In vain have I looked for a single man capable of seeing his own faults and bringing the charge home against himself'¹⁰. Therefore, after we realize our mistakes, we should correct them, that we cannot let Buddhas, bodhisattvas, sages, and teachers sigh or be disappointed.

⁸ 楊伯峻 [Yang Bojun] and 韋利 [Wei Li], 論語：漢英對照 [Lunyu Hanying Duizhao] (Chansha: Hunan Renmin Chubanshe, 1999), p. 65.

⁹ *The Governing Principles of Ancient China —Based on 360 passages excerpted from the original compilation of Qunshu Zhiyao*, 2nd edn ((M) Bhd: Chung Hua Cultural Education Centre), p. 151.

¹⁰ 楊伯峻 [Yang Bojun] and 韋利 [Wei Li], 論語：漢英對照 [Lunyu Hanying Duizhao] (Chansha: Hunan Renmin Chubanshe, 1999), p. 51.

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