

Trinity Saint David

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Choosing Neighbours to Nurture the Child 擇鄰教子

Good afternoon, DR. Ngo and fellow classmates. Today I will tell a story from the *Collectanea of Ethical Exemplars* 道德叢書 called “Choosing Neighbours to Nurture the Child”.

Outline

1. The Story: Original Text& Translation
2. Analysis: The Essence of ‘Education’
3. Application: Insights for Daily Life

Following this outline, I will first narrate the story — presenting both the original text and its translation. Then, I will analyse its core message to uncover the essence of education. Finally, we will explore together how to apply these insights in our daily life.

Before we start, I want to talk about Mencius, an ancient prominent Chinese philosopher, as well as the "second sage" for expanding Confucianism. I believe that his remarkable achievements are inseparable from his mother's education. I'll tell you the story of how Mencius' mother raised and educated him. In fact, the account consists of two short stories. Allow me to narrate these stories in English.

1. The Story: Original Text& Translation

Mencius' father passed away when he was three years old. His mother was a very virtuous woman, and she took on the whole responsibility of bringing him up and educating him on her own. At first, they lived near a cemetery. Mencius, very young at the time, began to imitate the funeral rituals he saw, like beating his chest and stamping his feet like people at funerals or pretending to dig graves. His mother thought, “This is not a good place for a child to grow up.” So, they moved near a marketplace. But guess what? Mencius started copying the merchants: bargaining, selling things, and shouting. His mother said again, “This still isn't the right place for a child.” Then they moved next to a school. This time, Mencius imitated the students and teachers-bowing politely, arranging ritual vessels, and learning manners. His mother finally said, “Now this is a suitable place for a child to live.” So, they decided to settle there. There's another story in Outer Commentary on the Han Poet. One day, their neighbour was slaughtering a pig. Mencius asked his mom why they are killing the pig, and his mother replied casually, “So that you can have something to eat.” But then she regretted and thought: "When I was pregnant, I paid careful attention to prenatal education in every aspect, if a mat wasn't in its right place, I wouldn't sit on it. And I also won't eat the pork if it wasn't cut right. But now I've lied to him just as he began to understand the world!" So, she bought pork from the neighbour and cooked it for Mencius, to prove that she kept her word.

2. Analysis: The Essence of ‘Education’

After hearing this story, I believe we are all deeply moved by Mencius's mother's education. It gives us a much deeper understanding of what 'education' really means. Let us take a moment to analyse it together. Education in Chinese means 教育. In the standard Chinese dictionary, it says:

Jiao 教 means the behaviour and speech of those above are what those below will follow. 上所施，下所效也。 "Those above" can refer to parents and teachers, and to the example and influence of the wider environment. "Those below" can refer to children and students, who learn by imitating and following these examples.

Yu 育 means to let a child know and do what is good. 養子始作善也。 Raising a child is not merely about providing food and helping them grow up; it is more about nurturing them through education and cultivation, allowing them to develop good moral character.

From prenatal education onwards, Mencius's mother paid careful attention to every detail. As the child grew, Mencius began imitating those around him: first, funeral rituals at the cemetery; then, market trading; and finally, school etiquette. A child learns what the environment manifests-this shows that the surroundings we live in and the people we associate with profoundly shape our habits and values. Just because Mencius's mother knew these principles of nurturing a child, so she moved three times to find the most proper and positive place for her child to live and always led Mencius by her example. This indicates the true essence of education.

3. Application: Insights for Daily Life

We may not be parents yet, but as teenagers, what can we learn from this? Our parents and teachers provide a good environment for us now, but one day we will step into the world by ourselves. How can we then create/seek the right living environment? How can we maintain proper understanding and judgment? And how can we shield ourselves from the influence of negative surroundings? I believe the following points can serve as a useful guide.

3.1 First, choosing friends is very important.

·Though a person possesses a fine nature and a discerning mind, it is imperative that he seek out a worthy teacher to serve and select virtuous friends to befriend. 夫人雖有性質美而心辯知，必將求賢師而事之，擇賢友而友之。 "Human nature is evil" (Xing 性 惡), *Xunzi* (Xunzi 荀子)

·Confucius said, three kinds of friends are beneficial; three kinds are harmful.

Straightforward friends, sincere friends, well-informed friends—these are beneficial.

Hypocritical friends, sycophantic friends, glib-talking friends—these are harmful. 孔子

曰：“益者三友，損者三友。友直，友諒，友多聞，益矣。友便闖，友善柔，友便佞，損矣。” *Analects* 16.4 (Trans. Watson)

Even if someone is naturally gifted and reasonably clear-headed, they still need to look

for good teachers to learn from and choose virtuous companions to associate with. Confucius gave us a “manual for choosing friends”. A straightforward friend will be able to point out your mistakes and stop you from going downhill. A well-informed friend can broaden your horizons. But a hypocritical friend makes you blind to your own weaknesses by giving you fake approval and will flatter you with fancy words and mess up your judgement. So, we need to have wisdom to make friends. Then, how can we increase our wisdom?

3.2 We should continuously learn. The thoughts from first to last should be fixed on learning.

念始終典於學。 “On Teaching and Learning” (Xueji 學記), *Records on Ritual* (Liji 禮記) (Trans. Legge)

The Master said, “Do not look unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not listen unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not speak unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not move unless it is in accordance with the rites.”子曰：非礼勿视，非礼勿听，非礼勿言，非礼勿动。 *Analects* 12.3 (Trans. D.C.Lau)

One should remain focused on learning, continuously studying and immersing oneself in the valuable teachings of teachers and virtuous individuals. By constantly enriching one’s moral knowledge and wisdom, one gains the discernment to distinguish right from wrong. This naturally enables one to resist the temptations of the external environment and to act in accordance with what Confucius said:” what does not align with propriety should not be looked at, listened to, spoken, or acted upon.” This wisdom guides us not only in our conduct but also in our choices, especially nowadays, we must choose our virtual “neighborhoods” as carefully as our physical ones.

3.3 We must proactively cultivate a wholesome information environment. Today, we live not only in physical space but also in an information space. The influencers you follow, the videos you watch, and the articles you read—all these subtly “educate” you in unseen ways. We can regularly review and filter our information sources: actively seek out content that inspires thought and encourages kindness, while reducing exposure to material that stirs up negative emotions, or promotes excessive materialism. This is, in essence, a modern form of "choosing the right neighbours."

3.4 Tseng Tzu said, “Every day I examine myself on three counts. In what I have undertaken on another’s behalf, have I failed to do my best? In my dealings with my friends have I failed to be trustworthy in what I say? Have I passed on to others anything that I have not tried out myself?” 曾子曰：「吾日三省吾身，為人謀而不忠乎？與朋友交而不信乎？傳不習乎？」 *Analects* 1.4 (Trans. D.C.Lau)

We must also cultivate the practice of self-reflection. Tseng Tzu said, “Every day I ask myself three questions. First, when I do things for other people, have I really done my best? Second, when I deal with my friends, have I been honest and kept my word? Third, have I ever told others to do something that I haven’t tried or practised myself?” We can also keep a daily

reflection journal, comparing our actions with the teachings of the classics and the guidance of our parents and teachers. Through this practice, we can continually correct our biases, laziness, and other negative habits.

Environment shapes us, but we can also learn to choose and shape our environment wisely. And when we become better selves, we can naturally begin to influence those around us. And that ends my presentation. Thank you for listening.

Choosing Neighbours to Nurture the Child

擇鄰教子

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Date: January 7, 2026

Outline

- 1 **The Story**
Original Text& Translation
- 2 **Analysis**
The Essence of ‘Education’
- 3 **Application**
Insights for Daily Life



1

The Story

Original Text& Translation





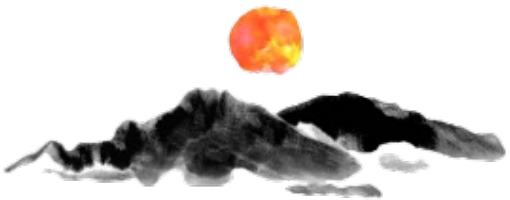
Mencius (born c. 371, ancient state of Zou, China—died c. 289 BCE, China) was an early Chinese philosopher whose development of orthodox Confucianism earned him the title “second sage.” Chief among his basic tenets was an emphasis on the obligation of rulers to provide for the common people. The book Mencius records his doings and sayings and contains statements on the goodness of human nature, a topic warmly debated by Confucianists up to modern times.

擇鄰教子

列女傳載。戰國時。孟子三歲喪父。母有賢德。身任教養。初居近墓。孟子嬉戲爲墓間事。踴躍築埋。孟母曰。「此非所以居子也。」乃去舍市。又嬉戲爲商賈事。母曰：「又非所以居子也。」遂徙學宮之旁。乃設俎豆。揖讓進退。母曰：「此真可以居子矣。」遂居之。又韓詩外傳載。東家殺豕。孟子問其母曰：「殺豕何爲？」母曰：「欲啖汝。」旣而悔之。曰：「吾懷妊是子。席不正不坐。割不正不食。胎教之也。今適有知而欺之。是教之不信也。」乃買東家豕肉以食之。明不欺也。



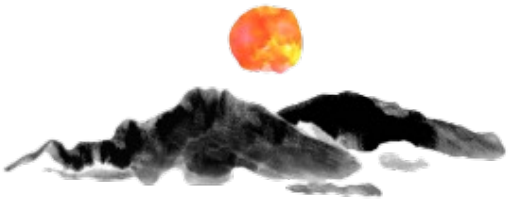
列女傳載。戰國時。
孟子三歲喪父。母有
賢德。身任教養。



As recorded in *Lienü Zhuan* 列女傳 (Biographies of Exemplary Women), during the Warring States Period (c.475–221 BCE) Mencius 孟子 (391–308 BCE) lost his father at the age of three. His mother, possessing excellent virtue, took on the responsibility of raising and educating her child on her own.

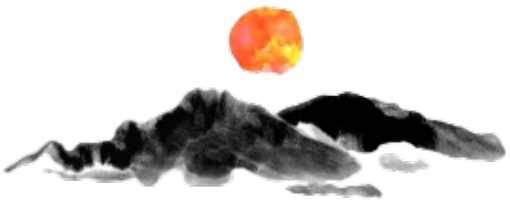
初居近墓。孟子嬉戲
爲墓間事。踴躍築埋。
孟母曰。「此非所以
居子也。」

At first, their dwelling was close to a cemetery. All the games Mencius played were imitations of things related to the graveyard, such as beating his chest and stamping his feet in mourning for the dead and digging graves to bury the deceased. Mencius' mother said, "This place is not suitable for a child to live."



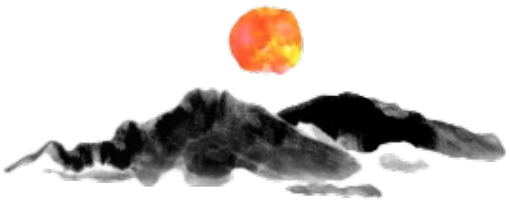
乃去舍市。又嬉戲爲
商賈事。母曰：「又
非所以居子也。」

Therefore, they moved to a residence near the marketplace. Again, Mencius spent his playtime imitating the trade and business of merchants. His mother said once more, “This place is not suitable for a child to live.”

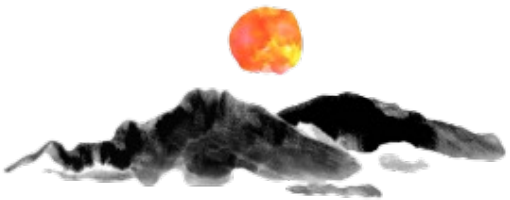


遂徙學宮之旁。乃設
俎豆。揖讓進退。母
曰：「此真可以居子
矣。」遂居之。

They then moved next to a school. Then Mencius began to learn how to arrange ritual vessels and practise the etiquette of bowing and yielding to others. His mother said, “This is truly a suitable place for a child!” And they settled there permanently.



又韓詩外傳載。東家殺豕。孟子問其母曰：「殺豕何爲？」母曰：「欲啖汝。」

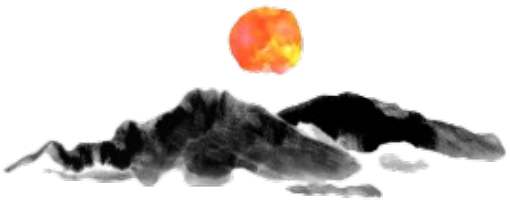


Additionally, *Han Shi Wai Zhuan* 韓詩外傳 (Outer Commentary on the Han Poetry) recorded—when their eastern neighbour was slaughtering a pig, Mencius asked his mother, “What is the pig being slaughtered for?” Mencius’ mother replied, “[I intend] to give you some to eat.”

Translation Text

既而悔之。曰：「吾懷
妊是子。席不正不坐。
割不正不食。胎教之也。
今適有知而欺之。是教
之不信也。」乃買東家
豕肉以食之。明不欺也。

She immediately regretted her words and thought: “When I was pregnant with his child, I would not sit if the mat was not properly aligned and would not eat if the meat was not cut straight. I paid careful attention to prenatal education in every aspect. Now that he has just begun to understand something, I have deceived him; this is teaching him to be dishonest!” So, she bought some pork from their eastern neighbour and gave it to Mencius, to show that she had kept her words.



2

Analysis

The Essence of ‘Education’



Education 教育

Jiao 教 (to teach): The behaviour and speech of those above are what those below will follow.

上所施下所效也。

Yu 育 (to nurture): To let a child know and do what is good.

養子使作善也。

The Standard Chinese Dictionary (Shuowen Jiezi 說文解字)



3

Application

Insights for Daily Life





As teenagers, having learned this story, how should we apply it in our daily lives?



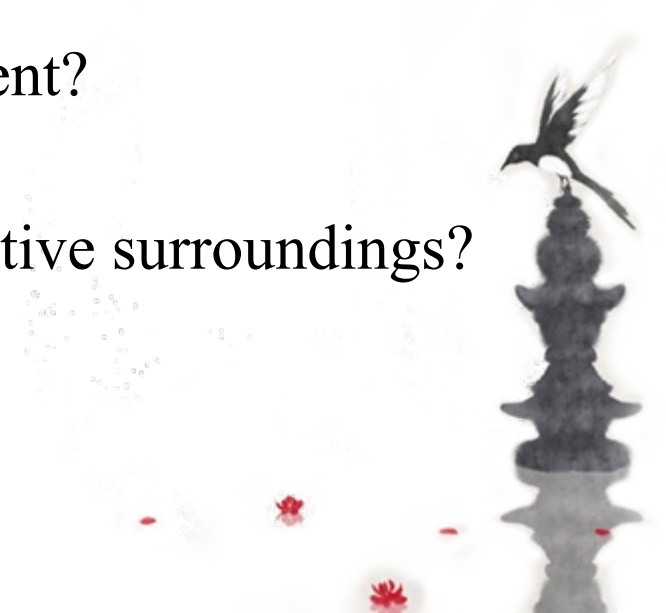
How can we then create the right living environment?



How can we maintain proper understanding and judgment?



how can we shield ourselves from the influence of negative surroundings?





Choosing friends

- Though a person possesses a fine nature and a discerning mind, it is imperative that he seek out a worthy teacher to serve and select virtuous friends to befriend.

夫人雖有性質美而心辯知，必將求賢師而事之，擇賢友而友之。

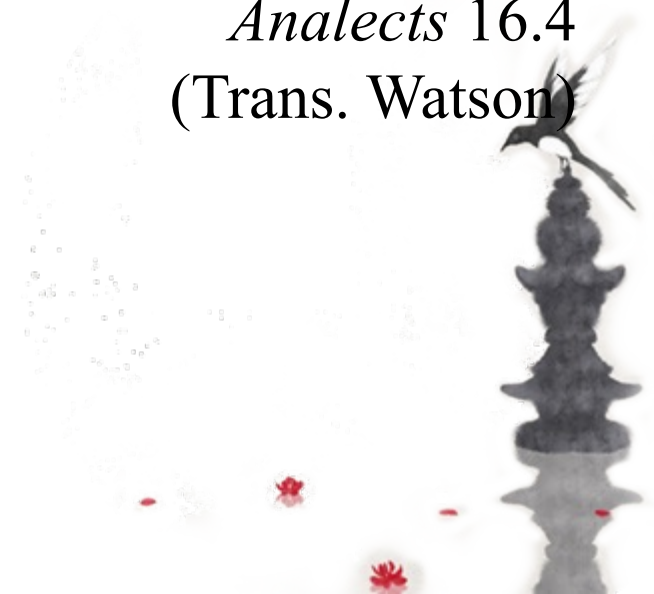
“Human nature is evil”(Xinge 性惡),
Xunzi (Xunzi 荀子)



- Confucius said, three kinds of friends are beneficial; three kinds are harmful. Straightforward friends, sincere friends, well-informed friends—these are beneficial. Hypocritical friends, sycophantic friends, glib-talking friends—these are harmful.

孔子曰：“益者三友，損者三友。友直，友諒，友多聞，益矣。友便闕，友善柔，友便佞，損矣。”

Analects 16.4
(Trans. Watson)





Learning continuous

- The thoughts from first to last should be fixed on learning.

念始終典於學。

“On Teaching and Learning” (Xueji 學記),
Records on Ritual (Liji 禮記)
(Trans. Legge)

- The Master said, “Do not look unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not listen unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not speak unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not move unless it is in accordance with the rites.”

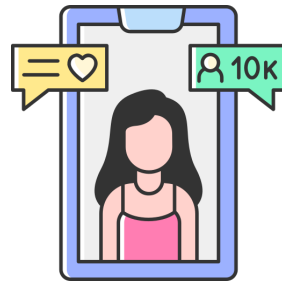
子曰：非礼勿视，非礼勿听，非礼勿言，非礼勿动。

Analects 12.3
(Trans. D.C.Lau)





Proactively Shape Your "Information Environment"



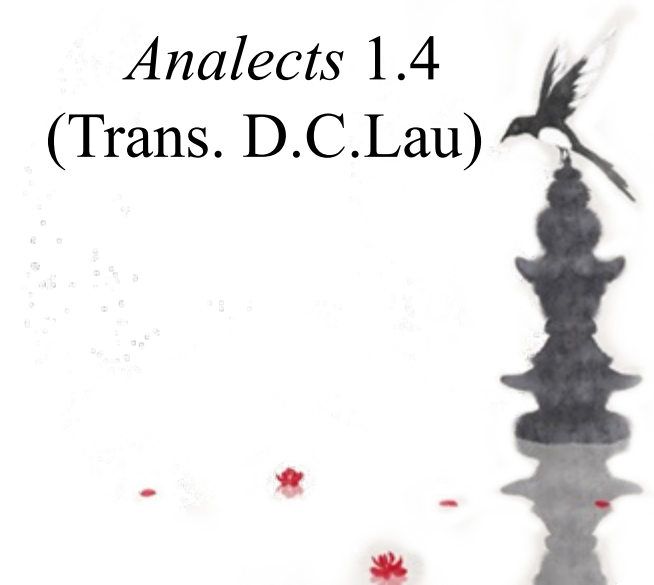
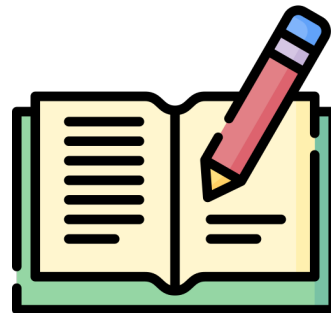


Self-reflection

- Tseng Tzu said, “Every day I examine myself on three counts. In what I have undertaken on another’s behalf, have I failed to do my best? In my dealings with my friends have I failed to be trustworthy in what I say? Have I passed on to others anything that I have not tried out myself?”

曾子曰：「吾日三省吾身，為人謀而不忠乎？與朋友交而不信乎？傳不習乎？」

Analects 1.4
(Trans. D.C.Lau)



Conclusion



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Thank you for listening!

