The Great *Analects*

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Words

*Analects*, written by Confucius’ students and their students, is a well-known collection of Confucius’ actions and words, in which Confucius’ political propositions, ethical thoughts, moral ideas and pedagogical principles are reflected. The *Analects* takes ancient Chinese as intended audience and the Confucianism behind this document has been profoundly influencing Chinese people for more than two thousand years. Therefore, as a Chinese, I have learned a lot from the *Analects*.

The first thing I learn from the *Analects* is filial piety. Filial piety acts as the most important emotional connection among Chinese families. Parents endure all kinds of hardship to give birth to you and raise you up, so you are supposed to appreciate them, obey them and please them. Confucius attached great importance to this as his father died when he was three. He knew how difficult for his mother to bring him up. Thus, we can see Confucius talking a lot about filial piety. For instance, in the Part 2 of *Analects*, some students asked Confucius what filial piety was. Mang I and Fan Ch’ih were told “It is not being disobedient.” (Confucius, *Analects* (excerpt), p.65) and Mang Wu, Tsze-tu, Tsze-hsia all got different answers. However, basically, the core idea behind filial piety is the same, which is to make parents comfortable whether they are alive or dead. By being obedient, not getting sick or helping the elders out of trouble, you perform the duty of the filial piety and you will receive mental accolade from your neighbors and other people. Such morality even extends to the requirement for people to highly respect other relatives. As a result, filial piety plays a pivotal part in unifying the society and makes it peaceful and stable, which is the reason why Chinese emperors use *Analects* to help government. However, traditional filial piety are chains to people, a considerable amount of whom perform such duty blindly or are forced to do things that they do not wish to. This has caused an uncountable amount of misfortune. When I was young, I was always ordered to do things due to filial piety. What I learn from filial piety is that, you do need to be grateful to parents and partially reward them by obeying them for bringing you up, but status between parents and children in a family should be more equal instead of being like leaders and subordinates.

Besides filial piety, *Analects* values virtue. Virtue is the key component of a society where people are kind and all live in happiness. When I was a child, I read numerous stories in textbook about people of good virtue who are willing to help, share and sacrifice, and they are also highly praised as their spirit will be inherited and their names will be remembered forever. This phenomenon obviously stems from *Analects*’ focus on virtue. Thanks to it, I develop virtue and benefit from it greatly, such as my friends are always ready to lend their hands to me.

However, showing the helpfulness of virtue, the *Analects* conveys a chaotic society to us. Such disorder was not directly and obviously described in the *Analects*. Nonetheless, we can still tell it from some subtle details. For instance, it is recorded that several rulers sought for assistance from Confucius on how to govern including the Duke Ai (Confucius, *Analects* (excerpt), p.65) and the Duke of Sheh (Confucius, *Analects* (excerpt), p.68, 69). If the society was not chaotic, there would be only one emperor rather than several rulers. Living in an era “when the centralized state was very weak and conflict between kingdoms took place on a frequent basis.” (Lecture #5), Confucius had been pursuing the realization of a harmonious society in his whole life. In his imaginary utopian, which is the basic assumption of this document, both people and rulers should have virtue. The rulers should govern the society with good virtue instead of punishment so that the people would also have such virtue and not break the laws, as per course reader, “If they be led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given them by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover will become good.” (Confucius, *Analects* (excerpt), p.65). In addition to it, instead of being bonded by the love brought by filial piety, people have mutual love between each other and they lead satisfactory and enriched lives. I think one reason for the *Analects* was composed is that Confucius hoped to realize such ideal society by letting people know how great such society is if people have virtue and writing into *Analects* would help the spread of his ideology.

The other reason for the document was written is that knowledge was inaccessible for the ordinaries in ancient China. Confucius, as an educator, a politician and a philosopher, deeply understood the importance of knowledge and felt necessary to educate ignorant Chinese. The *Analects*, written for all ancient Chinese, can not only enhance their personal morality, but also provide assistance for the kingdom rulers during the Eastern Zhou period to govern the kingdom. Hopefully, it would finally reach the stage when society is of great unity. To be more instructive, *Analects* must have been literarily processed, but such slight modification does not affect its credibility as historical materials, let alone there are also some Chinese document that can prove its validity.

The *Analects* does not have a story line. Instead, it is separated into chapters according to its content. For instance, Part 2 basically deals with the problems of how to administer the kingdom. The first paragraph “The Master said, ‘He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place and all the stars turn towards it.’” (Confucius, *Analects* (excerpt), p.64) emphasizes the significance of exercise government with virtue, which helps the people in the country “revolves” around the king. Part 13 gives Confucius’ ideas on how to behave and how to govern. For example, “The Master said, ‘When a prince’s personal conduct is correct, his government is effective without the issuing of orders. If his personal conduct is not correct, help may issue orders, but they will not be followed.’” (Confucius, *Analects* (excerpt), p.67). Similarly, this sentence informs us of the importance for rulers to be just and righteous.

Although more applicable to ancient China, the *Analects* still has some referential meanings to our current society. Filial piety unites our family between relatives and the virtue part is always educative and conducive to people. Not only does *Analects* teach us how to behave and how to deal with interpersonal relationship, making us better people, but also our society, consisting of individuals, benefits from such harmony.