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First Lesson—To Be Modest

By Yang Wu

Throughout the development of human wisdom, people have been continually summarizing life experiences from their daily lives and putting them into proverbs. Most of the principles we believe in have been learned from our ancestors, and they have influenced and shaped our behavior. So because we follow the wisdom handed down from our ancestors in the past, we know how to act during different situations in the present. There is one proverb that I think has the most influence on me, “Modesty helps one go forward, whereas conceit makes one lag behind.” This was said by our great leader of China, the first chairman, Mao. What this means is, as a human being, we have to learn for ourselves. Everyone can be our teacher, and when we learn how to be modest, we can succeed.

When I was a child, I was very satisfied being the only child in my family. I could get everything I wanted. Because I was so young and special, I had never learned how to share things with others, or how to listen to others’ words. One time, an adult started to think about my childish behavior and was ready to teach me how to be a good kid, and instead of yelling at me, my grandmother told me a story to teach me a lesson.

China is one of the most famous ancient civilizations in the world, and has so many stories and fables, one of which widely circulated from the past until now, called “Kong-rong Gives up the Biggest Pear.” In this story, a long time ago, there was a boy and when he was four years old, was able to recite many poems, and understand rites, and his parents were very proud of him. One day, when all family members were sitting together, his father brought some pears, chose one of the biggest pears and gave it to Kong-rong. Kong-rong looked at the biggest pear and shook his head, and instead chose the one of smallest pears and said, “I am the youngest, I should eat the smaller pear, and you should give the bigger pear to my old brother.” Everyone was surprised to hear these words from a four-year-old boy. The adults thought Kong-rong was the youngest boy in the family, and he supposed to be selfish and chose the biggest pear. He won praise from others. Kong-rong’s story was quickly spread through the whole town and has been

handed down. Many parents educated their children by using Kong-rong as a good example. They want their children to learn to be modest to people who were older.

After my Grandmother had finished the story, it was not easy to understand why Kong-rong picked the smallest one, but it was a good lesson for me. Kong-rong was almost the same age as I was told the story, and I followed Kong-rong's behavior because I like being complimented. As I got older, the more knowledge that I learned, the better that I could understand the meaning of Kong-rong's story. Kong rong was the smallest child in the family, so he knew he had to practice modesty.

The real lesson that I have learned from Kong-rong was that for the five thousand years of Chinese Civilization, modesty is always promoted as an important virtue. Whether inside the family or outside in society, the first lesson we had to learn is modesty and respect for others. So inside the family, we must place ourselves in the right position. Our parents have gone through more difficulties than we have, so when we are talking to them, our position should be as a good listener. We also need to think about if it is reasonable to accept their opinions. Outside in society, do not be arrogant when one wins, nor be too depressed when one loses. There are also many external impacts that have influence on us, so understanding the impact would help us to learn how to be modest.

Kong-rong's story is very difficult to understand, especially for children, because the value concept has influenced children too much. Children like to ask for nice clothes, toys and food, but they do not understand the value of those things. They become selfish when they have new toys because they do not want to share the toys with others. That is why at the first time, I could not understand an adult's intentions in telling us the story. To understand the conflict between value orientation and moral idea is a good lesson to learn. Most of the children in China are living under the one-child policy. They are born in a very wealthy society. The development of society made children become self-centered, and they would never think about giving or modesty. So these kinds of children think Kong-rong's behavior was stupid. As the sense of competition increases, more and more people believe that to trust themselves is the smartest choice, under this situation, modesty is almost being replaced. Today, we should know modesty is not only for regular people's behavior, but more about inherent ethics. Modesty is not only a story for us to learn, but also an important lesson for us to understand.

Most people think that the story of Kong-rong has no more educational value but I disagree. Although Kong-rong's story is too difficult for children to understand, it highlights the importance of teaching the story to children. Modesty is a traditional virtue, once it is understood it would become a great value for the whole society. Imagine that everyone in the society understands the real meaning of modesty. The society would become more peaceful and more developed. Modesty supports the progress of the society, and maybe the story of Kong-rong is too far away, but there can be some changes in the story.

Just telling the story was maybe boring because the story of Kong-rong is too old, but people who are going to tell the story can be more flexible. Some changes can be made for the story. After changing that, when the story is being told to children, we can add some recent views. Such as why Kong-rong's brother did not pick the smallest pear or we can add some ideas from work, meanings, like the more work you would do, the more pears you would get. From the story of work they can realize that if you want to get something, you have to work for it and work hard. When the day comes that you are going to harvest, you can feel the happiness.

“Out of three, there must be one who can teach me.” said Confucius (Van Norden). This is a very famous thought from Confucius. It explains to us why we should be modest, because if three of us are walking together, there is at least one person good enough to be my teacher. I should accept it, and to listen to others' advice. To be modest is not stupid if we are in a competition, because maybe you can get a good outcome that you never expected. Modesty is necessary in our lives; the oldest and youngest must always go first. Sometimes when you cannot figure out how to solve a problem, take one step backward, and you will find a new way. When you are in a big argument, modestly think about the other's view, and then both of you will find a good way to solve the problem.

Work Cited

Van Norden, Bryan W. *Confucius and the Analects*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. Print.