

PROF YU DAN:

Thank you Prof Cheng for his introduction and I would like to thank the Asian Cultural Co-operation Forum for giving me this opportunity to share with you my own thoughts about culture, my own.

This morning I met scholars whose books I've read since I was young. I have been very much inspired by them. Prof Yuan Xingpei and many senior scholars in the field,

I'm here to talk about my own understanding of the classical literature. I'm not even in the same league with these senior scholars. I can only share with you what I have learned from the analects and that's all.

Today we're talking about Chinese culture, core values and modernity, so that's about the question of how we could have cultural values expressed in modern days. That's something we need to explore.

Culture means something that is alive among people, that are shared by all. So when we talk about humanity, we have ancient writings, those are learnings for us, and there are plenty of classical writings. They have great value, but how could they be integrated in our daily lives? How could they shape us in our development? How could they stimulate our cultural genes so that we don't just talk about culture as culture, we can actually live in culture?

Those are the questions I have. That's why I try to explore the questions. To me, culture is like a pyramid. At the tip of the pyramid, we're talking about a theory but at the base of the pyramid we're talking about putting it into practice.

When we talk about core values, of course there are theories and writings that could be passed on from generation to generation so that we could further explore the thoughts, the thinking and the teachings.

Then the other aspect, which is not just about poetry, it's not just about politics. People are also about passing on culture. So

instead of talking about theories or academic studies, how can we feel culture in our daily lives and how can we then pass on culture? We don't regard culture as a research subject, but while culture may not be systematic, it may not be structured, but somehow it's able to influence people and so that should be another value of culture.

Of course, there are many people coming into experience culture and today when we talk about Chinese modernity, I think we should regard culture as a form of habitat. It's not just about theories and teachings. It's about cohesion among the people and crystallization among the people. In the 21st century, we have cultural diversity and integration, so what is the value of Chinese cultural core values?

Of course, many of you must have read about the works of Prof Ge Zhaoguang and he talk about the pluralistic form of Chinese culture. But pluralism of Chinese culture is also an attitude about culture, that's whether we are accommodating in promoting culture and expending culture, because where a culture is strong, it's not an absolute authority, but rather it is a pluralistic, it is accommodating.

Take, for instance, Confucianism. In the Han Dynasty, was Confucianism dominant? No, at that time already and when we thought with half the book of the analects, you're able to rule the world? Actually it's not, it's just a partial truth, understanding. Because culture is living. It is alive.

We live in today's world. When we talk about culture -- I'm here from the mainland, I'm here to exchange views with you. I think in the 21st century, in China we are experiencing far too much partial truth and understanding of culture. When we look at our cultural history, an author or a poet is either classified as Confucian or a Taoist or he if he's a poet he's either romantic or he's a realist. So it's either black or white, right or wrong.

What is in between is considered as conflicts. So it's considered something static. And then each side will consider its own thinking and thoughts, but rather they don't look at this relationship as a dynamic one.

So in the 21st century, when we pass judgment on various things that seems to be the attitude, so that's why in the recent history, China has experienced two drastic transformations. At one point it was considered Chinese culture stood in the way of the development of the country and then we had cultural revolution that turned the culture upside-down. During each of these movements, Chinese culture was totally negated but in the past decade or so, it seems the people have overcorrected the situation.

We consider Confucianism as a replacement of religion as if to say that as long as we embrace Confucianism, we are back on the right path. Someone tells me he puts the analects by his pillow and he reads it every day. Would it be good for his career? Or, "If I have marital problems or other career problems, which chapters of the analect should I read to find answers?" I think that's misleading.

But let's not talk about the academic merits of the classical literature. We have to talk about a healthy state of mind. We should be consider about things around us, near us, not something far away and distant. It should be something warm and human.

But at the same time, we have some sort of belief and that will help redeem us from our sufferings so we cannot exaggerate the importance of Chinese culture, we cannot belittle it too much either.

So today, what I would like to talk about is that when culture becomes a healthy cycle, a cycle again, we're going to restore culture to its right form and we can see the transformation of culture and there's just a person in the communities or how do we embrace that change?

I would like to talk about two points. One: we could embrace culture in our daily life. The other kind is to embrace culture from a distance. So these are the two ends. On one side we're talking about daily life. In Chinese history how many people could be labelled one way to say that they only belong to one particular field or school? I think with any great culture, we should have great personality, broadmind. Any successful politicians are just intellectuals who have been successful in their government political career.

In ancient China, they believed that good intellectuals should become officials. But that's just the two opposite ends. It just so happened because you were born the right time and you've been spotted by someone, so intellectuals, some intellectuals became government officials. But then there were others who never managed to have a proper career. It's like in (Chinese name) life or in (Chinese name) life we have seen many such cases. They have huge changes in their life. They were between careers. So this is something rather philosophical. At the end, you could also sum it up in a religious way. (Chinese name) in his later years, he wrote poems and then (Chinese name) eventually came to realise that political career meant little. So you can't say this is pure Confucianism or Taoism.

So there is nothing absolutely pure. So that's why when you read about the lives of intellectuals, you can understand more about culture, how it should exist in life.

I majored in Chinese studies, so people would ask us, "What is the core value of a literary work? What about the diction and also the meaning? Is that sufficient? How can we blend in all the elements and let them become an organism, so that we can read life out of a literary work?"

So we have to go back to the basics. When we are all so worldly, we have to go back to the fundamentals and read such classics.

From a philosophical point of view, I think some of them might be regarded as history books and the analects might not be written as stringently as history books, but then there is literature in it and there is also the issue (Chinese spoken) and therefore it should top the classics.

What we need is this passion and to understand them, and we should understand history and modern day situation and then we should seek to regard culture in a healthy manner. So I think this is from the point of an intellect and this is how I interpret culture.

Another approach is to look at it from a distance. Although we are from a distance, we might be able to understand it in a simple manner. What is the core value of the analects? It contained more than 20,000 words and the word "man" has been mentioned 109 times.

How simple is this word? Well, it all boils down to a belovedness and love. A disciple once asked Confucius, "If a person has got all the knowledge then is he a great man?" Confucius said, "There's no need for you to be great, there are so many great men."

What is meant by "man"?

I think Confucius' interpretation is you should benefit yourself as well as other people and you should treat others as you would like to be treated. That should be the core value of human beings.

It's not easy to be done. We say that this is just a philosophical argument. It's not really practical. Actually, Confucius said that all you have to do is to start from your heart. So you uphold your own dignity and to put it simply, you should treat this world in a benevolent manner and you should have faith.

And then this is how a person should start his career. And then a real gentleman will achieve something great and his sense of benevolence will enable him to achieve great things.

So we should practice these principles in our daily living. Any manager of an enterprise can follow these principles. We can build in these principles in managerial practice.

So I would say that the whole thing is very practical. Although it started from ideology, it could actually be practiced, so everything starts from your heart. You should take care of elders of other people as if they were your own elders, you should take care of other people's children as if they were your own children. So if everyone has fear and worry, then if we can adopt humility as professed by Confucius, then we don't need to have fear and worry. And we should adopt a self-reflective attitude and there would be comfort in our heart.

In the past half-year, I have frequently heard that now national studies and classical studies are now in fashion and people like Confucianism. Whether they are hot topics or not, I don't like these descriptions. Iciness will follow passion, coldness will follow warmth. This kind of great volatility is not really good. People are rather superstitious about Confucianism. I hope that we can have a sustained interest and let's not be materialistic.

People can read, get something out of the analects regardless of their age. When I was very young, I was asked to recite the analects. When I became a teenager, I liked the teachings that I should work for the wider good and then I was really passionate when I read those words. 23 years down the road, what I like best is the exchanges between Confucius and his disciples.

Confucius was asked by his disciple what was his ideal and he said that he wanted to be trusted by everyone and I think this should be our aim or goal. Before we play a certain role, now if we do not carry dignity with us, we should be careful with those who are younger than us or our peers and those who are our senior we should be careful.

Now, if we can let the elderly feel comfortable, if we can muster trust from our peers, if we can get the trust and confidence, or respect of our juniors, then this is successful. It's not easy to achieve, but this is the start of our life and when I read the analects, well, in a spring day Confucius was travelling with his disciples and they saw pheasants and fowls on the road and those fowls suddenly took flight and Confucius was pleased to see how peaceful it was and how wildlife was enjoying life as well. So the wild birds flew away. So it was just a very simple scene but it was warm and pleasing.

Nowadays, when we are by ourselves, if we can feel warmth in the winter or when the boundaries between the seasons are blurred, can we feel the simple pleasure? We have lost our tranquility because we have lost our simple life. We are surrounded by this material world and we now are very interested in acquiring skills and technology. I think this is a double-bladed sword. Our inner peace and confidence ourselves are being erode.

Once Confucius was asked, "What is a gentleman?" and he said, "A gentleman has nothing to fear, nothing to worry." The other person said, "Well, is it as simple as that?" If you do not reflect on yourself sufficiently, you can't achieve this status. If you have no worry, no fear and you don't have to depend on any person, if you can rely on yourself, then you are a real gentleman, you have no fear and no worry. So it's as simple as that.

Now people like to read classics. You may say that it is too difficult to read these difficult texts, but I would like to say that you are reluctant to read them not because they are too difficult, rather it is because they are too simple and crude. But

if you can remove the outer layers, then you can find crystal inside.
The teachings are very simple.

The same can be said to the works of (Chinese name). Even if you read about the sense of universe and life, well, this is a good starting point. It is about the process of life. We should always start from our small self and then we can communicate with the universe.

When we do not understand these texts, then we should say that actually there is order and there are principles in this universe. You should feel with your heart. It would be better than for you to read any interpretation by other people.

We used to say that it's better to travel than to read. Now our technology is very advanced and we're getting lazy. We don't like to travel as much. We like to rely on good modes of transport, we seldom climb hills any more, and we would like to take the cable car instead. This is tragic. Perhaps we've lost our ability to walk and to travel; we have lost the ability to discover new things through sweat and pain.

So what is the process? (indistinct word), I like -- the sense of light in (indistinct word). He said that our heart is a container. We should go through the process of life. Certainly it is like a light and we should keep that light in our hearts.

What light are we talking about? Not a very glamorous kind of light. Rather, the light is not glaring. You should not boast that the world belongs to you. The light will give you strength that it's not just about yourself. It's a possibility of succinct development.

In the beginning, I said that I have benefited from the teachings and works of our senior scholars. I'm actually not qualified to say anything in depth with you. I'm just sharing with you my feelings.

We have to use our heart to read the classics. We should develop this inspiration. "We all have different courses of life", perhaps the general public can use this attitude. We can just adopt a very simple approach and read the classical texts and try to internalise what you read and then you can then develop this light and warmth in your heart and that can become part of you and culture will have a meaning in modern days and the culture core values would then have some meaning in this modern life.

My views are not yet mature, but I'm more than happy to share with you my feelings.