

No Matter How You Try, Heaven Controls the Outcome

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Mr. Zeng Guofan (1811--1872) was a scholar in a small mountain village. Cultivating his virtue and perfecting his family, he became a famous first class courtier in the Qing Dynasty. He tried with all his might to save the declining Qing Dynasty by helping to create "Relative Prosperity" during the time of Tongzhi (1856--1875), the 8th Emperor of the Qing Dynasty. Many times Mr. Zeng advised his younger brothers in his letters that man needs to watch his integrity and study hard as this leads to family prosperity and helps to establish good careers. He said in one of his letters to his younger brothers:

"People like us can only rely on accumulating virtue and studying hard. Accumulating virtue means to respect the older generation, listen to our older brothers, be kind and have integrity. Studying hard means to master the skills of writing poetry, literature and calligraphy. These two things we can take control of on our own. If we progress one foot, that is our own one foot; if we progress one inch, that is our own one inch. If we accumulate one bit of virtue, it is equal to accumulating one pound of grain; if we progress by studying one bit tomorrow, it is equal to saving one penny. When we increase both virtue and study, then our family can become more prosperous day by day."

As for wealth and fame, Mr. Zeng believed "No matter how you try, Heaven controls the outcome." He taught his younger brothers:

"As for fame and wealth, they are all predestined, totally out of our control. There was an official who had his two grandsons become the students of a good friend, and made them *kowtow* (bow) to him in front of others. Both grandsons became sick before the big exam. Their parents died just as they were about to take the First Class Exam. They could not attend the school as they were in mourning for their parents. They both started school several years late. You see, even the time to attend school is predestined. Although how well we are prepared for the test is up to us, whether we pass the test or not is controlled by Heaven. We must not have any wild thoughts. The sixth younger brother had better inborn quality than his siblings but he did not pass the exam. It is understandable that he was angry and felt distressed. While Heaven arranged this, you should try harder and not give up due to anger."

"No matter how you try, Heaven controls the outcome." People can have the wish to accomplish certain goals and try as hard as they might. Whether they can be successful is up to Heaven's wish. "No matter how you try, Heaven controls the outcome" is a similar thought to a cultivator's principle of "Follow the course of nature." The foundations of the Buddha School, the Tao School and the teachings of Confucius are all cultivation cultures, which created the splendid Chinese traditional culture. This is why Chinese traditional culture is also called a "semi-divine" culture.

Currently, China is getting further and further away from its own culture. In the old days, children had to study the *Four Classics* (1) and the *Five Classics* (2). The rituals were all embedded in aspects of cultivation. The culture of cultivation and thought were deeply embedded in people's minds, guiding their daily life and behavior.

Notes:

(1) *Four Classics* - the Chinese classic texts selected by Zhu Xi in the Song Dynasty to serve as an introduction to Chinese philosophy and Confucianism which included *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Analects of Confucius*, and *The Mencius*.

(2) *Five Classics* - Classic of Changes, Classic of History, Classic of Poetry, Collection of Rites, and the Spring and Autumn Annals.