

信 (XIN)

信為立國之基 立人之本 故孔子曰 民無信不立 又曰 人而無信 不知其可

XIN (Trustfulness) is the foundation of a country and the principle of mankind. Owing to that, Confucius said, "If a country's government is not Trustworthy, its citizens cannot rely on it." He also said, "If a person is not Trustworthy, how can that person establish himself in society?"

夫信字從人從言 謂人之出言 必需真實 不可稍有虛偽也

The character of XIN, which comprises the words "mankind" and "word", implies that each person's word must be truthful; not a lie or deceit.

虛偽者 言不顧行 行不顧言 親友不相倚託 鄰里不相敬恭

A person who is lying and deceiving has words that don't match his deeds and deeds that don't match his words. His friends will not rely on him and his neighbors will pay him no respect.

虛言詐語 無人聽從 何者

蓋一次失信 則啟人疑 二次失信 則惹人恨 恨則眾叛親離 人皆不與交接
是乃自賤自棄 而不自居於人類也 不亦大可惜哉

Lying and deceiving words always fall on deaf ears. Why?

The first time a person shows untrustworthiness, people start to be suspicious; The second time, it provokes hatred. Such hatred moves his friends to betrayal, his relatives stay away, and everyone else shuns him.

Such a pitiful person is self-destructive and regretfully hardly a human being!

吾嘗考之 天地之道 不外一信

日以信出信入 南北有極 故人皆以為則

月以信生信死 朔望有常 故人皆以為準

I have researched that the TAO of Heaven and Earth is XIN itself.

Trustworthy the sunrise and sunset are, so people use them as guides;

Trustworthy the cycle of new moon and full moon are, and people use them as rules.

列星有信 運行不差 時序有信 代謝不亂 故聖人取之以為政

The planets have such XIN that they revolve in their orbits without straying. Four seasons have their XIN so that the time of blossoming and withering does not deviate from regularity. Therefore, the Sages made such trustworthy natural cycles a model for their governmental system¹.

Note¹: In ancient China, the government would normally reward its officials or citizens in the Springtime, to coincide with the seasonal beginning of life. On the other hand, the government would mandate that all prisoners under a sentence of death be executed in the Fall to coincide with the time of withering.

人能法天地之信以為信 則無愧於三才矣

If mankind emulates the XIN of Heaven's and Earth's, we are not inferior, but indeed form a coordinate being part of the Three Main Entities of this world (Heaven, Earth, Mankind).

易曰 誠信存存 道義之門

吾人欲修其道 必於信上著手 蓋信義立而道自在矣

I-Ching¹ counseled, "When XIN is steadfastly kept, we can come to the entrance of morality and justice."

To comport with this TAO, we begin with XIN. Once XIN is established, this TAO will naturally be.

Note¹: I-Ching is the first written Chinese sutra which attempts to explain all natural phenomena. Furthermore, some people use it to predict the future.

昔人有言 大奸似忠 大詐似信

An old saying reminds us: an extremely treacherous person acts loyal; a devious swindler seems XIN.

信與詐雖大不同 然苟外裝誠信 內懷奸詐 則他人受其愚 罹其害而不覺 終亦未有不知者

呂氏曰 受欺之害 身害也 欺人之害 心害也 哀莫大於心死 而身死次之

XIN and swindling differ so profoundly that if a person cunningly pretends to have XIN, people are deceived and suffer damage unawares. Such scandal is always uncovered eventually.

Scholar Lu¹ said, "One who is swindled suffers a physical deprivation, but one who swindles suffers a deprivation in one's heart. The deepest sorrow is to have your heart ruined, not your body."

Note¹: Scholar Lu was an idealist philosopher of Confucianism in Song Dynasty (AD 960-1279).

呂氏斯言 蓋謂人而無信 即為心死 其害比身死為尤大也

These words from Scholar Lu illustrate that a person who is not trustworthy ruins his heart, his essence of being a person. Such damage incalculably exceeds in gravity any harm to the physical body.

是以季布一諾千金 侯嬴一言為重 皆不敢失信於人 致取欺心之害
此無他 心即天也 有負於心即有負於天
人欲全性以全天 可不於信字加諸意乎

Thus, Gwai Bou's "A promise, a thousand pounds of gold¹" and Hou Yin's "A promise, a most serious matter²" enjoin all people to keep their word to avoid grievous damage in their hearts. If nothing else, the heart is Heaven. Betraying the heart betrays Heaven. If people want to preserve both heart and Heaven, they must deeply meditate on XIN (Trustfulness).

Note¹: Gwai Bou, who was a general of Chu in the Han Dynasty (BC 770-221), was well known for keeping his promises. There was a proverb, describing a promise from Gwai was worth more than a thousand pounds of gold.

Note²: Hou Yin accepted service under the nobleman Wei in the Warring States period (BC 475-221) when he was seventy. He helped the nobleman Wei tactically plan a military expedition to relieve another region-state which had been attacked by Qin. After the military planning was complete, Hou spoke to the nobleman Wei. Hou expressed his sense of duty to go to the front with the force, but said he couldn't because of his old age. However, he promised Wei that he would sacrifice himself to pay back the service that he could not accomplish. As the two armies engaged, Hou carried through on his promise and sacrificially perished.