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Chinese Cultural Studies:
Confucius Kongfuzi (c. 500 CE)
The Analects, excerpts

Themes in Confucian Teaching

Jen - Humaneness
Junzi (chün-tzu)- the Superior Man, or Gentleman, or Scholar
Li - Rites
Yüeh -Music
Learning and Teaching
Government
Rectifying The Names

Jen (Humaneness)¹

XII.22: Fan-ch'ih asked about jen. The Master said, "It is to love all men." He asked about knowledge. "It is to know all men." Fan ch'ih did not immediately understand these answers. The Master said, "Employ the upright and put aside all the crooked; in this way, the crooked can be made to be upright."

VII.29: The Master said, "Is humaneness a thing remote? I wish to be humane, and behold! humaneness is at hand."

VI.28: Tzu-kung said, "Suppose I put the case of a man who extensively confers benefits on the people, and is able to assist everyone, what would you say about him? Might he be called perfectly humane?" The Master said, "Why speak only of humaneness in connection with him? Must he not have the qualities of a sage? . . . Now the man of perfect humaneness, wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others. To be able to judge of others by what is nearby in ourselves, that is what we might call the art of humaneness."

XV.23: Tzu-kung asked, saying, "Is there one world which may serve as a rule of practice for all one's life?" The Master said, "Is not reciprocity such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

XIV.36: Someone said, "What do you say concerning the principle that injury should be recompensed with kindness?" The Master said, "With what then will you recompense kindness? Recompense injury with justice, and recompense kindness with kindness."

VII.15: The Master said, "With coarse rice to eat, with water to drink, and my bended arm for a pillow; I still have joy in the midst of these things. Riches and honors acquired by inhumanity are to me as a floating cloud."

IV.25: The Master said, "Virtue is not left to stand alone. He who practices it will have neighbors."

XV.8: The Master said, "The determined scholar and the man of virtue will not seek to live at the expense of humanity. They will even sacrifice their lives to preserve their humanity."

VII.6: The Master said, "Let the will be set on the path of duty. Let every attainment in what is good be firmly grasped. Let perfect virtue be accorded with. Let relaxation and enjoyment be found in the polite arts."

The Superior Man (chün-tzu)²

XX.3: The Master said, "Without recognizing the ordinances of Heaven, it is impossible to be a superior man (chün tzu)."

XV.17: The Master said, "The superior man in everything considers righteousness to be essential. He performs it according to the rules of propriety (li). He brings it forth in humility. He completes it with sincerity. This is indeed a superior man."

XV.31: The Master said, "The object of the superior man is truth, not food. . . . The superior man is anxious lest he should not get truth; he is not anxious lest poverty should come upon him."

IV.16: The Master said, "The mind of the superior man is conversant with virtue; the mind of the base man is conversant with gain."

IV.5: The Master said, "Riches and honors are what men desire. If they cannot be obtained in the proper way, they should not be held. Poverty and baseness are what men dislike. If they cannot be avoided in the proper way, they should not be avoided. . . . The superior man does not, even for the space of a single meal, act contrary to virtue. In moments of haste, he cleaves to it. In seasons of danger, he cleaves to it."

XV.20: The Master said, "What the superior man seeks, is in himself. What the mean man seeks, is in others."

XII.4: Ssu-ma Niu asked about the superior man. The Master said, "The superior man has neither anxiety nor fear." "Being without anxiety or fear!" said Ssu-ma, "does this constitute what we call the superior man?" The Master said, "When internal examination discovers nothing wrong, what is there to be anxious about, what is there to fear?"

XIV.24: The Master said, "The progress of the superior man is upwards; the progress of the mean man is downwards."

XVI.8: Confucius said, "There are three things of which the superior man stand in awe. He stands in awe of the ordinances of Heaven. He stands in awe of great men. He stands in awe of the words of the sages. The mean man does not know the ordinances of Heaven, and consequently does not stand in awe of them. He is disrespectful to great men. He makes sport of the words of the sages."

XIV.29: The Master said, "The superior man is modest in his speech, but exceeds in his actions."

XV.18: The Master said, "The superior man is distressed by his want of ability. He is not distressed by men not knowing of him."

XV.21: The Master said, "The superior man is dignified, but does not wrangle. He is sociable, but not partisan."

XVII.24: Tzu-kung asked, "Has the superior man his hatreds also?" The Master said, "He has his hatreds. He hates those who proclaim the evil of others. He hates the man who, being in a low station, slanders his superiors. He hates those who have valor merely, and are unobservant of propriety (li). He hates those who are forward and determined, and, at the same time, of contracted understanding."

XVI.10: Confucius said, "The superior man has nine things which are subjects with him of thoughtful consideration. In regard to the use of his eyes, he is anxious to see clearly. In regard to the use of his ears, he is anxious to hear distinctly. In regard to his countenance, he is anxious that it should be benign. In regard to his speech, he is anxious that it should be sincere. In regard to his doing of business, he is anxious that it should be reverently careful. In regard to what he doubts about, he is anxious to question others. When he is angry, he thinks of the difficulties his anger may involve him in. When he sees gain to be got, he thinks of righteousness."

XIX.9: Tzu-hsia³ said, "The superior man undergoes three changes. Looked at from a distance, he appears stern; when approached, he is mild; when he is heard to speak, his language is firm and decided."

XV.36: The superior man is correctly firm, and not merely firm.

Li (Rites)⁴

III.3: The Master said, "If a man be without the virtues proper to humanity,⁵ what has he to do with the rites of propriety?⁶ If a man be without the virtues of humanity, what has he to do with music?"

VIII.2: The Master said, "Respectfulness, without the rules of propriety,⁷ becomes laborious bustle; carefulness, without the rules of propriety, becomes timidity; boldness, without the rules of propriety, becomes insubordination; straightforwardness, without the rules of propriety, becomes rudeness."

III.4: Lin Fang asked what was the first thing to be attended to in ceremonies. The Master said, "A great question, indeed! In festive ceremonies, it is better to be sparing than extravagant. In the ceremonies of mourning, it is better that there be deep sorrow than a minute attention to the observances."

III.26: The Master said, "High station filled without indulgent generosity; ceremonies performed without reverence; mourning conducted without sorrow—where with should I contemplate such ways?"

XI.1: The Master said, "The men of former times, in the matters of ceremonies and music,⁸ were rustics, it is said, while the men of these latter times, in ceremonies and music, are accomplished gentlemen. If I have occasion to use those things, I follow the men of former times."

III.17: Tzu Kung wished to do away with the offering of a sheep connected with the inauguration of the first day of each month. The Master said, "Tzu Kung, you love the sheep; I love the ceremony."

Yüeh (Music)

III.23: The Master instructing the Grand music master of Lu said, "How to play music may be known. At the commencement of the piece, all the parts should sound together. As it proceeds, they should be in harmony, severally distinct and flowing without a break, and thus on to the conclusion."

IX.14: The Master said, "I returned from Wei to Lu, and then the music was reformed, and the pieces in the Imperial songs and Praise songs found all their proper place."

Learning and Teaching

IX.4: There were four things from which the Master was entirely free. He had no foregone conclusions, no arbitrary predeterminations, no obstinacy, and no egotism.

XVII.2: The Master said, "By nature, men are nearly alike; by practice, they get to be wide apart."

XVI.9: Confucius said, "Those who are born with the possession of knowledge are the highest class of men. Those who learn, and so readily get possession of knowledge, are the next. Those who are dull and stupid, and yet compass the learning are another class next to these. As to those who are dull and stupid and yet do not learn--they are the lowest of the people."

VII.8: The Master said, "I do not open up the truth to one who is not eager to get knowledge, nor help out any one who is not anxious to explain himself. When I have presented one corner of a subject to any one, and he cannot from it learn the other three, I do not repeat my lesson."

IV.9: The Master said, "A scholar, whose mind is set on truth, and who is ashamed of bad clothes and bad food, is not fit to be discoursed with."

VIII.12: The Master said, "It is not easy to find a man who has learned for three years without coming to be good."

XII.15: The Master said, "By extensively studying all learning, and keeping himself under the restraint of the rules of propriety, one may thus likewise not err from what is right."

IX.18: The Master said, "The course of learning may be compared to what may happen in raising a mound. If there want but one basket of earth to complete the work, and I stop, the stopping is my own work. It may be compared to throwing down the earth on the level ground. Though but one basketful is thrown at a time, the advancing with it is my own going forward."

XIV.47: A youth of the village of Ch'üeh was employed by Kung to carry the messages between him and his visitors. Someone asked about him,

saying, "I suppose he has made great progress." The Master said, "I observe that he is fond of occupying the seat of a full-grown man; I observe that he walks shoulder to shoulder with his elders. He is not one who is seeking to make progress in learning. He wishes quickly to become a man."

XIV.25: The Master said, "In ancient times, men learned with a view to their own improvement. Nowadays, men learn with a view to the approbation of others."

XV.29: The Master said, "To have faults and not to reform them--this, indeed, should be pronounced having faults."

IX.28: The Master said, "The wise are free from perplexities; the virtuous from anxiety; and the bold from fear."

Government

&_II.7: Tzu-kung asked about government. The Master said, "The requisites of government are that there be sufficiency of food, sufficiency of military equipment, and the confidence of the people in their ruler." Tzu Kung said, "If it cannot be helped, and one of these must be dispensed with, which of the three should be foregone first?" "The military equipment," said the Master. Tzu Kung again asked, "If it cannot be helped and one of the remaining two must be dispensed with, which of them should be foregone?" The Master answered, "Part with the food. From of old, death has been the lot of humanity; but if the people have no faith in their rulers, there is no standing for the state."

XII.14: Tzu-chang asked about government. The Master said, "The art of governing is to keep its affairs before the mind without weariness, and to practice these affairs with undeviating consistency."

XII.19: Chi K'ang-tzu asked Confucius about government, saying, "What do you say to killing unprincipled people for the sake of principled people?" Confucius replied, "Sir, in carrying on your government, why should you use killing at all? Let your evinced desires be for what is good, and the people will be good. The relation between superiors (chün-tzu) and inferiors is like that between the wind and the grass. The grass must bend, when the wind blows across it."

XIII.6: 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, he may issue orders, but they will not be followed."

VII.10: The Master said to Yen Yuen, "When called to office, undertake its duties; when not so called, then lie retired . . . Tzu-lu said, "If you had the conduct of the armies of a great state, whom would you have to act with you?" The Master said, "I would not have him to act with me, who will unarmed attack a tiger, or cross a river without a boat, dying without any regret. My associate must be the man who proceeds to action full of caution, who is fond of adjusting his plans, and then carries them into execution."

XIV.23: Tzu-lu asked how a sovereign should be served. The Master said, "Do not impose on him, and, moreover, withstand him to his face."

III.18: The Master said, "The full observance of the rules of propriety⁹ in serving one's prince is accounted by people to be flattery."

XI.23: "What is called a great minister,¹⁰ is one who serves his prince according to what is right, and when he finds he cannot do so, retires."

XIV.1: Hsien asked what was shameful. The Master said, "When good government prevails in a state, to be thinking only of one's salary. When bad government prevails, to be thinking, in the same way, only of one's salary. That is what is shameful."

IX.13: "When a country is well governed, poverty and mean condition are things to be ashamed of. When a country is poorly governed, riches and honor are things to be ashamed of."

XIV.20: The Master was speaking about the unprincipled actions of the duke Ling of Wei, when K'ang Tzu said, "Since he is of such a character, how is it he does not lose his throne?" Kung Fu-Tzu said, "Chung-shu Yu has the superintendence of his guests and strangers; the litanist, T'uo, has the management of his ancestral temple; and Wang-sun Chia has the direction of the army and forces: with such officers as these, how should he lose his throne?"

Rectifying the Names

XII.17: Chi Kang-tzu asked Confucius about government. Confucius replied, "To govern (cheng) means to rectify (cheng).¹¹ If you lead on the people with correctness, who will dare not to be correct?"

XIII.3: Tzu-lu said, "The prince of Wei has been waiting for you, in order that you administer (cheng) the government. What will you consider the first thing to be done?" The Master replied, "What is necessary is to rectify (cheng) names." "So, indeed!" said Tzu-lu. "You are wide of the mark. Why

must there be such rectification?" The Master said, "How uncultivated you are, Yu! A superior man, in regard to what he does not know, shows a cautious reserve. If names be not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things. If language be not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success. When affairs cannot be carried on to success, proprieties (li) and music (yüeh) will not flourish. When proprieties and music do not flourish, punishments will not be properly awarded. When punishments are not properly awarded, the people do not know how to move hand or foot. Therefore a superior man considers it necessary that the names he uses may be spoken appropriately, and also that what he speaks may be carried out appropriately. What the superior man requires, is just that in his words there may be nothing incorrect."

ENDNOTES

1 See the introduction above for the meaning of this word. From this point on, I will use "humaneness" or "humanity" or "virtue" to translate this word rather than Legge's "benevolence."

2 Or the "gentleman."

3 This is Pu Shang, a disciple of Confucius and the man primarily responsible for the transmission of the Confucian Classics. He figures prominently in Analects XIX.

4 Li refers to more than just "rites," but also means something like "decorum," "propriety," or "manners," that is, all those traditional, stable and ritualized forms of behavior which govern our day to day conduct. The word does, however, sometimes refer specifically to religious or political rituals.

5 "The virtues proper to humanity" is another way of translating jen .

6 "Rites of propriety" is a translation of li .

7 The "rules of propriety" is another way of translating li .

8 Li and Yüeh.

9 Li

10 That is, a minister or servant to a prince.

11 Or "correct." The meaning of this sentence derives, of course, from the similarities between the word "to govern" and "to correct."

Some More resources on Chinese culture

Texts

Confucius, The Analects , full text