

Article

## The Cultured Man as the Noble Man: *Jun zi* 君子 as a Man of *Li* 禮 in *Lun yu* 論語

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**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to show the Confucian virtue of *li* as the highest embodiment of the *Jun zi* as found in the *Lun yu*. While *ren* remains the most primary and most important of the virtues, it is an inner goodness which can only find its expression or manifestation in the virtue of *li*, while such manifestation is made possible only through an external ontological ideal that is the virtue of *yi*. As such, the interplay of *ren* and *yi*, which finds its harmony in *li*, is made possible only through the embodiment of *li* as a dynamic moral principle given substance by *ren* and given form by *li*, and perfected by the *Jun zi*.

**Keywords:** *Jun zi*, *Li*, Confucius, ritual, propriety

*Li*, or rituals and propriety, when viewed by the modern mind, can have the tendency to be dismissed by modernity as nothing more than empty tradition which binds and limits one's capabilities, especially in a generation which celebrates the creation of one's self as an art form.<sup>1</sup> From the Confucian perspective, however, it does just exactly the opposite, which is to widen one's horizons, that is, consciousness, and thus capabilities as well.

Indeed, one cannot help but wonder just how following ancient, even outdated, traditions can possibly be a virtue. What does this matter of culture, commonly understood as something that's amoral,<sup>2</sup> have to do with becoming a good citizen of the state, or even becoming a good human being?

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<sup>1</sup> See Nietzsche's body of works, among other counter-enlightenment thinkers, which dominate the intellectual trends of contemporary society.

<sup>2</sup> That is to say, that high culture as an aesthetic virtue is, after modernity, commonly averse to morality. In a way, culture can even be said to be meta-ethical in that it is the context, which shapes ethics and is therefore not boxed within morality. Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, Foucault, among other thinkers of modernity argue to this effect.

Yet *li* is considered as one of the five primary Confucian virtues, and as I will try to argue, even the very virtue, which the Noble Man or *Jun zi* embodies most.

It is thus the aim of this study to show the relation between *ren* and *li*, being that *li* is the manifestation of *ren* in its concreteness, but which is made possible by the concept of *yi*. This interplay of *ren* and *yi*, which finds its harmony in *li* is, as I will try to prove, found in the *Lun yu* to be embodied in the *Jun Zi*.

In order to do this, I will first show the utmost importance of *ren*, its immediacy and immanence, as well as show the two aspects of *ren*, which are *zhong* and *shu*. Next, I will show the implication of *yi* in *zhong* and *shu*, coming to the conclusion that *yi* is an external moral ought while *ren* is an internal motivation for goodness. The third section will thus deal with the notion of *li* as the concrete manifestation of the previous two virtues, where the compassion of *ren* and the unflinching discipline of *yi* find their perfect harmony. Finally, thus, I will try to show the *Jun Zi* as a man of *li* who, in him, and in practicing *li* to its full effect, is also able to embody *ren* as well as *yi*.

## I. 仁 *Ren*

Perhaps there is no other virtue more important than *ren*. *Ren* is commonly translated as virtue,<sup>3</sup> fundamental goodness,<sup>4</sup> true goodness,<sup>5</sup> benevolence,<sup>6</sup> or idiosyncratically 'authoritative conduct,'<sup>7</sup> which connotes the firm and steadfast nature of how one's character should be.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, *ren* is regarded as even more important than life itself,<sup>9</sup> and

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<sup>3</sup> James Legge and Arthur Waley translate 仁 *Ren* simply as 'virtue' and although this captures the encompassing nature of 仁 *Ren* (that is, that it necessarily precludes the other virtues, which shall later be discussed), it can be quite problematic in distinguishing it from 德 *de*, which also directly translates into the word 'virtue,' which has a different and less substantive meaning than the concept of 仁 *Ren* in the Analects. See Confucius, "The Analects," trans. by James Legge, in *Chinese Text Project*, <<http://ctext.org/analects>>, 19 September 2014. See also Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. by Arthur Waley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Confucius, "Analects of Confucius," trans. by A. Charles Muller, in *Research for East Asian Language and Thought*, <<http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/analects.html>>, 19 September 2014.

<sup>5</sup> *The Four Books: The Basic Teachings of the Later Confucian Tradition*, trans. by Daniel K. Gardner (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2007).

<sup>6</sup> D.C. Lau.

<sup>7</sup> Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, trans. Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> *Ren* is all these but also more, and as such, will be referred to simply as *ren*.

<sup>9</sup> The Master said, "For Gentlemen of purpose and men of benevolence while it is inconceivable that they should seek to stay alive at the expense of benevolence, it may happen that they have to accept death in order to have benevolence accomplished." See Confucius, *The*

“The Master said, ‘If a man sets his heart on benevolence, he will be free from evil.’”<sup>10</sup> In other words *ren* comes at the helm, serving as a shield from all malevolence that threatens to sully the character of he who possesses the virtue of *ren*. Furthermore, The Master says, “... The gentleman never deserts benevolence, not even for as long as it takes to eat a meal. If he hurries and stumbles, one may be sure that it is in benevolence that he does so.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, when one has become aware of *ren*, it can no longer be undone nor erased from one’s character.

The essence of *ren*, however, is perhaps highlighted through the verse in the *Lun yu* which reads: “The Master said, ‘It is Man who is capable of broadening the Way.’”<sup>12</sup> It is not the Way that is capable of broadening Man.”<sup>13</sup> Such is the humanist foundations of his moral philosophy, which looks at man as the locus of the unity between heaven and earth. This saying of the Master is fleshed out in the rest of the *Lun yu*, and is mostly seen in the virtue of *ren*; it is derived from the root words 人 *ren* meaning person or human, and 二 *er* meaning two,<sup>14</sup> which suggests that human beings are irreducibly social, and can only exist by co-existing.

### a. The Anthropocentricity of *ren*

If *ren* has no fixed definition in the *Lun yu*, it is because *ren*, as Ames and Rosemont would note, is “a qualitative transformation of a *particular*

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*Analects (Lun Yu)*, trans. by D C. Lau (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979). 15:9. Henceforth cited as *Book:Verse*, D.C. Lau.

<sup>10</sup> 4:4, D.C. Lau.

<sup>11</sup> 4:5, D.C. Lau.

<sup>12</sup> Literally Dao, though it should be noted that the Confucian Dao is different from the Dao referred to in *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, as well as the rest of the Daoist school. The Confucian Dao is, unlike the metaphysical Dao of Daoism, anthropologically bent. It is simply an “ought” as opposed to metaphysical principle defining the nature of Being, much less a heavenly canopy which watches over the ten thousand things. In order to elucidate this further, this Dao is what Mencius refers to as Heaven when he describes *Tian Ming*: “Heaven sees according as my people see; Heaven hears according as my people hear.” See Mencius, *The Works of Mencius*, trans. by James Legge (New York: Dover Publications, 1990), 18:8. It is also what Xunzi was referring to when he cited the Book of Documents in the chapters “Improving Yourself” and “A Discussion of Heaven,” where he notes that: “The Book of Documents say ‘Do not go by what you like, but follow the way of the king; do not go by what you hate, but follow the king’s road.’ This means that a gentleman must be able to suppress personal desire in favor of public right.” See Xunzi, *Basic Writings*, trans. by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 32; 88.

<sup>13</sup> 15:29, D.C. Lau.

<sup>14</sup> See Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, trans., *The Analects of Confucius*, 48-51, for a comprehensive discussion on the etymology of 仁 as well as its corresponding significance to the philosophical meaning of the concept, which suggests that we are inevitably social and that without another or other human beings, we cannot exist alone.

person,"<sup>15</sup> indeed more like a process of becoming rather than having a fixed formula. Further, in the *Lun yu*, "The Master said, 'Is benevolence really far away? No sooner do I desire it than it is here,'"<sup>16</sup> because what is internal is that which is most accessible and, for Confucian philosophy in particular, must become evident in *praxis* and as such, becomes the measurement through which one can know others. Another passage in the *Lun yu* which goes like this is, when: "Tzu-hsia said, 'Learn widely and be steadfast in your purpose, inquire earnestly and reflect on what is at hand, and there is no need for you to look for benevolence elsewhere.'"<sup>17</sup> *Ren* is thus humaneness that is not simply in theory, but concrete and immanent, even firm and unrelenting.

The anthropological bent can be further seen in more passages in the *Lun yu*, when "The Master said, 'It is enough that the language one uses gets the point across,'"<sup>18</sup> as the Master did not want to deal with unnecessary hair-splitting, and believed that the only wisdom which mattered was that which is communicable, so it is with *ren*, in that if one is good inside, then it must show one's deeds; it must be concrete. Moreover, it is said that "the topics the Master did not speak of were prodigies, force, disorder and gods,"<sup>19</sup> for the Master believed that whatever is out there cannot be known by man, for even that which is here, is not yet understood by man, and so deserves more focus.

This said, we see that *ren*, in order to be fully manifest, or to be actualized, must be seen or communicated, and this is done only (as I will later argue how) through the practice of *li*, the importance of which is seen particularly when "The Master said, 'Guide them by edicts, keep them in line with punishments, and the common people will stay out of trouble but will have no sense of shame. Guide them by virtue, keep them in line with the rites, and they will, besides having a sense of shame, reform themselves.'"<sup>20</sup>

### b. Zhong (忠) and Shu (恕)<sup>21</sup>

According to Fung Yu-lan, there are two aspects of *ren*. He notes:

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> 7:30, D.C. Lau.

<sup>17</sup> 19:6, D.C. Lau.

<sup>18</sup> 15:40 D.C. Lau.

<sup>19</sup> 7:20 D.C. Lau.

<sup>20</sup> 2:3 D.C. Lau.

<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note, that both ideograms contain the character *xin* 心 literally translated as heart, but also associated with the mind, and hence more commonly referred to as the mind/heart. As such, it is also interesting to note the relation of *ren* both to human emotion and reason. See Alfredo P. Co, *The Blooming of a Hundred Flowers: Philosophy of Ancient China* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 1992), 107-108 for a comprehensive discussion of the etymological significance of the ideograms in relation to *ren*.

Thus the practice of *jen* consists in consideration for others. "Desiring to sustain oneself, one sustains others; desiring to develop oneself, one develops others." In other words: "Do to others what you wish yourself." This is the positive aspect of the practice, which was called by Confucius *chung* or "conscientiousness to others." And the negative aspect, which was called by Confucius *shu* or "altruism," is: "Do not do to others what you do not wish yourself." The practice as a whole is called the principle of *chung* and *shu*, which is "the way to practice *jen*."<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, Yu-lan maintains that this "principle of applying a measuring square" is a principle wherein one uses himself in order to be able to gauge his own conduct.<sup>23</sup>

*Zhong* is often translated simply as loyalty and faithfulness. James Legge in particular translates it as faithfulness<sup>24</sup> or devotion of soul,<sup>25</sup> but a more apt illustration of *zhong* is found in D.C. Lau's translation of a verse in the *Lun yu* where the Master says: "Make it your guiding principle to do your best for others ..."<sup>26</sup> This directly supports Yu-lan's claim that *zhong* is indeed the positive aspect of *ren*.

The negative aspect of *ren* that is *shu*, on the other hand, is also reflected in the *Lun yu* when: "Tzu-kung asked, 'Is there a single word which can be a guide to conduct throughout one's life?' The Master said, 'It is perhaps the word *shu*.'"<sup>27</sup> Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire."<sup>28</sup>

One notices here, that whether it be 忠 *zhong* or 恕 *shu*, positive or negative, both are treated as the supreme virtue, because both aspects of 仁 *ren*, which as we have previously mentioned, consist the most important Confucian virtue. This claim is cemented by one of the oft-cited verses in the *Lun yu*, that is:

The Master said, 'Ts'an! There is *one single thread binding my way together*.'  
Tseng Tzu assented.  
After the Master had gone out, the disciples asked,

<sup>22</sup> Yu-lan Feng, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. by Derk Bodde (New York: The Free Press, 1966). 43

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> See 1:8, 3:19, 9:25, 12:10, James Legge.

<sup>25</sup> See 7:25, James Legge.

<sup>26</sup> 9:25, D.C. Lau.

<sup>27</sup> James Legge translates this as *reciprocity*.

<sup>28</sup> 15:24, D.C. Lau.

'What did he mean?'

Tseng Tzu said, 'The way of the Master consists in doing one's best and in using oneself as a measure to gauge others. That is all.'<sup>29</sup> 「夫子之道，忠恕而已矣。」

That is indeed all, but the phrase "one single thread binding my way together" presupposes a system wherein the philosophy of the Master is built upon, and at its core, according to the verse, is *zhong* and *shu—ren*. One should be careful, however, not to interpret this in a literal sense. Rather, 忠 *zhong* and 恕 *shu* should be guided by *yi*.

The sinologist, Alfredo Co, in his book "Philosophy of Ancient China: the Blooming of a Hundred Flowers," says that *yi* is implied in *zhong* through *zheng ming* or the Rectification of Names.<sup>30</sup>

The Master said, 'If something has to be put first, it is, perhaps, the rectification (cheng) of names.'

Tzu-lu said, 'Is that so? What a roundabout way you take! Why bring rectification in at all?'

The Master said, 'Yu, how boorish you are. Where a gentleman is ignorant, one would expect him not to offer any opinion. When names are not correct, what is said will not sound reasonable; when what is said does not sound reasonable, affairs will not culminate in success; when affairs do not culminate in success, rites and music will not flourish; when rites and music do not flourish, punishments will not fit the crimes; when punishments do not fit the crimes, the common people will not know where to put hand and foot. Thus when the gentleman names something, the name is sure to be usable in speech, and when he says something, this is sure to be practicable. The thing about the gentleman is that he is anything but casual where speech is concerned.'<sup>31</sup>

This again, further supports *ren* as the very foundation of the Confucian moral system, where *zhong* that is being true to one's principle and truth is manifested, and where the firmness of *yi* is indeed implied.

It is, however, my contention that *yi* is also implied in *shu* even if simply on account of *shu* being a guiding principle towards which we must strive, albeit through restraint—still, moral restraint. What I am trying to

<sup>29</sup> 4:15, D.C. Lau. Emphasis/Italics mine.

<sup>30</sup> Co, *Philosophy of Ancient China*, 109.

<sup>31</sup> 13:3, D.C. Lau.

arrive at is that *yi*, righteousness or moral rightness, is an external ideal, which guides our moral actions, made possible by such two aspects of *ren*.

## II. 義 *Yi*

If *ren* therefore is self-reformation, it takes its form from the moral ought, *yi*. In the *Lun yu*, “The Master said, ‘For the gentleman it is morality that is supreme. Possessed of courage but devoid of morality, a gentleman will make trouble while a small man will be a brigand.’”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, if *ren* is the internal motivation for the goodness, *yi* is the ontological yet external ideal — the universal moral of *ren* towards which *li*, as we will later discuss, directs its particular acts. Of the *Jun Zi*, “The Master said, ‘In his dealings with the world the gentleman is *not invariably for or against anything*. He is on the side of what is moral.’”<sup>33</sup> This, again, affirms the thesis that *ren* has no fixed definition nor function, but is rather, a process which allows for the practice of *li*, according to what is *yi*, in the context of the uniqueness and singularity of each situation and particular circumstance. Moreover, it asserts *yi* as a constant and universal ideal or righteousness (or more aptly, rightness) upon which *li* is modeled upon.

In his article “On Yi as a Universal Principle of Specific Application in Confucian Morality,” Chung-ying Cheng claims that *yi* gives unity to all virtues, and creates more when needed, thus directing what is appropriate for specific situations as an ordering principle which generates specific actions.<sup>34</sup> Like *ren*, Cheng argues that it is a common sentiment to all men rooted from *ren*, and so whereas *ren* is internal, *yi* is external. *Yi* “transforms the world into a world of self,”<sup>35</sup> because it is when the subjective act assumes objective validity. A passage in the *Lun yu* which affirms this is when “The Master said, ‘It is these things that cause me concern: failure to cultivate virtue, failure to go more deeply into what I have learned, inability, when I am told what is right, to move to where it is, and inability to reform myself when I have defects.’”<sup>36</sup> Here, we notice that The Master talks about cultivating *ren*, which is “deeply” within, while *yi* or that which is right is mentioned as something “to move to” in order to reform oneself; that is, *yi* is depicted as something outside of man but towards which he must strive as an ideal of moral perfection, an imperative for moral action, that is (if paired with 仁 *ren* and refined by *li*) required for a community to prosper, have peace

<sup>32</sup> 17:23, D.C. Lau.

<sup>33</sup> 4:10, D.C. Lau.

<sup>34</sup> Chung-ying Cheng, “On yi as a Universal Principle of Specific Application in Confucian Morality,” in *Philosophy East and West*, 22:3 (July 1972): 269-80.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> 7:3, D.C. Lau.



and order, as is thus noted in the *Lun yu*:

When Fan Ch'ih left, the Master said, 'How petty Fan Hsu is! When those above love the rites, none of the common people will dare be irreverent; when they love what is right, none of the common people will dare be insubordinate; when they love trust- worthiness, none of the common people will dare be insincere. In this way, the common people from the four quarters will come with their children strapped on their backs. What need is there to talk about growing crops?'<sup>37</sup>

We go back, therefore, to when "The Master said, 'It is Man who is capable of broadening the Way. It is not the Way that is capable of broadening Man.'"<sup>38</sup> Moreover, "The Master said, 'The gentleman understands what is moral. The small man understands what is profitable.'"<sup>39</sup> This is because as we have previously mentioned, *yi* is the capability to connect subjective actions, unique and situational as well as circumstantial deeds into a universal ought which changes flexibly from situation to situation, in the same way that *li* changes according to the situation. The small man, unable to rise to the universal level of *yi*, only thinks of himself and, therefore, of personal profit.

This is also why, "the Master said, 'It is quite a remarkable feat for a group of men who are together all day long merely to indulge themselves in acts of petty cleverness without ever touching on the subject of morality in their conversation!'"<sup>40</sup> *Yi* elevates the subjective, the particular into the communal, and to be exposed to the community and the normative expectations of society, without ever taking *yi* into consideration, would indeed be a shame as it would lead to insubordination and chaos.

This elevation from personal to community, or transformation of the world into a "world of self" as previously mentioned, is again found in a passage from the *Lun yu*, which says:

Tzu-lu commented, 'Not to enter public life is to ignore one's duty. Even the proper regulation of old and young cannot be set aside. How, then, can the duty between

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<sup>37</sup> 13:4, D.C. Lau.

<sup>38</sup> 15:29, D.C. Lau.

<sup>39</sup> 4:16, D.C. Lau; James Legge 'The Master said, "The mind of the superior man is conversant with righteousness; the mind of the mean man is conversant with gain.'" (君子喻於義.)

<sup>40</sup> 15:17, D.C. Lau.



ruler and subject be set aside? This is to cause confusion in the most important of human relationships simply because one desires to keep unsullied one's character. The gentleman takes office in order to do his duty. As for putting the Way into practice, he knows all along that it is hopeless.<sup>41</sup>

We can thus conclude that for the Master, *ren* finds no expression without *yi*, for it is only through *yi* where man is brought into a world where others truly exist, and where there can be found an ontological moral given, upon which *ren* directs itself towards. Indeed, "The Master said, 'Make it your guiding principle to do your best for others and to be trustworthy in what you say, and *move yourself to where rightness is, then you will be exalting virtue.*'"<sup>42</sup> In other words, to move towards *yi* is to exalt virtue (now in a more general/wider sense): *de*. Here, moreover, the word used in the Chinese for "exalt" is 崇 *chong*, which can also mean to worship, to hold high, or to honor—all of which imply a movement of feeling towards a more superior realm. This is because when *yi*, as was claimed by Chung-ying Cheng, pulls all other virtues into the objective realm.

*Yi* thus ensures that the moral deed is done, while *ren* ensures that the motive is aligned. These two make two sides of the same coin. Therefore just as *ren* manifests itself in *li*, *yi* is the form upon which *li* is expressed. Of the *Jun Zi*, "The Master said, 'The gentleman has morality as his basic stuff and by observing the rites puts it into practice, by being modest gives it expression, and by being trustworthy in word brings it to completion. Such is a gentleman indeed!'"<sup>43</sup> In other words, the Master Kong says that, the gentleman has *yi* as his basic stuff, and by observing *li*, puts it into practice.

This very position of *li*, where it is the concrete manifestation of the harmony between *ren* and *yi*, as well as the Confucian anthropological and practical bent, is precisely what makes *li* very important despite common misconceptions that *li* is impractical—abstract rituals that are "out there" and without rational explanations.

### III. 禮 *Li*

In Lin Yutang's work, "The Wisdom of Confucius," the following passage on *li* goes, as follows:

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<sup>41</sup> 18:7, D.C. Lau.

<sup>42</sup> 12:10, D.C. Lau, Emphasis/Italics mine. (Virtue here is 德 *de*, not 仁 *ren*)

<sup>43</sup> 15:18, D.C. Lau.

“Is *li* so very important as all that?” asked Tseyu again.  
 “This *li*,” replied Confucius, “is the principle by which the ancient kings embodied the laws of heaven and regulated the expressions of human nature. Therefore he who has attained *li* lives, and he who has lost it dies.”<sup>44</sup>

I would like to emphasize here how *li* is the harmony of the embodiment of heavenly laws,<sup>45</sup> as well the regulation, the medium, for expression of human nature. This passage from the Book of Rites suggests that the authenticity of a man consists of him in being a man of *li* which comes with it, both *ren* and *yi*.

*Li*, however, despite referring to sacrificial rites is, in the Confucian sense, largely humanistic and anthropological in nature. If it talks of any such higher order, or heavenly canopy at most, it is only inasmuch as *li*, although manifested by *ren*, takes its shape through the ontological moral given, thus universal principle that is *yi*. To repeat a previously quoted passage for emphasis:

The Master said, ‘The gentleman has morality as his basic stuff and by observing the rites puts it into practice, by being modest gives it expression, and by being trustworthy in word brings it to completion. Such is a gentleman indeed!’<sup>46</sup>

Here, we see the interconnection of *ren* and *yi*, practiced into *li*. More importantly, however, is to establish the connection of *ren* and *li*, as we have already established the implied *yi* in the two aspects of *ren*.

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<sup>44</sup> Confucius, *The Wisdom of Confucius*, trans. and ed. by Yutang Lin (New York: Random House, 1938), 229.

<sup>45</sup> Heavenly laws here in no way refer to *fa*. In fact, it is important to stress the difference between *fa* or law and *li* in the *Lun yu*. While *fa* is only mentioned twice, it plays an important role in shaping the multitude. One passage which describes its role is: 「法語之言，能無從乎？改之為貴。…」 The only way to preserve the meaning of which is to provide a rather awkward but very literal translation that goes: “When lawful words are spoken, can one refuse to follow? But to change is most valuable.” See *Lun Yu* 9:24, translation mine. In other words, it is emphasized here how obeying laws or words spoken in a strict and authoritative manner is easy, but true virtue lies within the inner character. This sentiment also mirrors a passage that can be found in the *Li ji*, which reinforces the idea that *fa* is for the *xiao ren* while it is *li* that is for the superior man or *da ren*: “The rules of ceremony do not go down to the common people. The penal statutes do not go up to great officers.” See “Qu Li I,” in *The Book of Rites (Li Ji): English-Chinese Version*, trans. by James Legge (Washington: Intercultural Press, 2013), par. 68.

<sup>46</sup> 15:18, D.C. Lau.

In his article "Li as Cultural Grammar: On the Relation between Li and Ren in Confucius' *Lun yu*," Chenyang Li uses the analogy of grammar and language in such a way that *li* becomes cultural grammar, while *ren* is the mastery of a culture.<sup>47</sup> This claim is sketched against a much controversial debate with regard to the relation between *li* and *ren*, as well as several claims on the interpretations of *li* and *ren*. My argument, however, follows along the same path as Chenyang Li's interpretation, where he claims that *ren* is flexible because *ren* as mastery is more like an art, whereas *li* as grammar becomes proper expression, but uses a different analogy. In other words, it's an instrumentalist claim broadly construed, wherein *li* and *ren* complement and need each other in order to function. Moreover, we see in the *Lun yu*, and even in the *Da Xue*,<sup>48</sup> several analogies of the virtues to a tree. Indeed, *ren* is the root, but the concrete practice of *ren* is *li*. It is said in the *Lun yu*, that: "The gentleman devotes his efforts to the roots, for once the roots are established, the Way will grow therefrom. Being good as a son and obedient as a young man is, perhaps, the root of a man's character."<sup>49</sup> Here, we see that *ren* as practiced becomes *li*, and through *yi*, in a web of interconnection and in this particular case, takes on the concrete form of filial piety. This analogy, as well as Chenyang Li's, is mostly supported by the following passages in the *Lun yu*:

The Master said, 'Why is it none of you, my young friends, study the Odes? An apt quotation from the Odes may serve to stimulate the imagination, to show one's breeding, to smooth over difficulties in a group and to give expression to complaints.'<sup>50</sup>

The Master said, 'Surely when one says "The rites, the rites," it is not enough merely to mean presents of jade and silk. Surely when one says "Music, music," it is not enough merely to mean bells and drums.'<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Chenyang Li, "Li as Cultural Grammar: On the Relation between Li and Ren in Confucius' Analects," *Philosophy East and West*, 57:3 (July 2007), 311-29.

<sup>48</sup> In the following verses, it would seem that *ren* was precluded. "From the Son of Heaven down to the mass of the people, all must consider the cultivation of the person the root of everything besides."

"It cannot be, when the root is neglected, that what should spring from it will be well ordered."

See *The Great Learning*, trans. by James Legge, 13-14. This is not improbable, as The Master himself would say that he is merely a transmitter of ancient wisdom: "The Master said, 'I transmit but do not innovate; I am truthful in what I say and devoted to antiquity.'" See *The Analects*, trans. by D.C. Lau, 7:1.

<sup>49</sup> 1:2 D.C. Lau.

<sup>50</sup> 17:9 D.C. Lau.

<sup>51</sup> 17:11 D.C. Lau.

The Master said, 'A cowardly man who puts on a brave front is, when compared to small men, like the burglar who breaks in or climbs over walls.'<sup>52</sup>

*Li* cannot exist in of itself, but as it is not simply *li*, which becomes empty without *ren*, *ren* also becomes impossible without *li*, for even with *li*, it is difficult. "The Master said, 'Even with a true king it is bound to take a generation for benevolence to become a reality.'"<sup>53</sup>

As Chenyang Li notes: "*Ren* cannot exist independently of *li*, nor can one obtain *ren* without *li*, because *li* is embedded in the culture of which the person of *ren* acquires mastery. In other words, without *li* there can be no culture for the person of *ren* to master."<sup>54</sup>

This can again be traced back to the *Lun yu*, when "The Master said, 'If a man be without the virtues proper to humanity, what has he to do with the rites of propriety? If a man be without the virtues proper to humanity, what has he to do with music?'"<sup>55</sup>

*Ren* and *li*, therefore, are to be understood as interconnected where *li* is instrumental to the practice of *ren*, and where *ren* simply cannot function without *li* as its guiding principle.

The Master said, 'To return to the observance of the rites through overcoming the self constitutes benevolence. If for a single day a man could return to the observance of the rites through overcoming himself, then the whole Empire would consider benevolence to be his. However, the practice of benevolence depends on oneself alone, and not on others.' ....

The Master said, 'Do not look unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not listen unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not speak unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not move unless it is in accordance with the rites.'<sup>56</sup>

Confucius himself was an example of this, "The Master said, 'I set my heart on the Way, base myself on virtue, lean upon benevolence for support

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<sup>52</sup> 17:12 D.C. Lau.

<sup>53</sup> 13:12 D.C. Lau.

<sup>54</sup> Chenyang Li, "Li as Cultural Grammar," 323-324.

<sup>55</sup> 3:3, James Legge. "If a man be without *ren*, what has he to do with *li*; if a man be without *ren*, what has he to do with music?"

<sup>56</sup> 12:1, D.C. Lau.

and take my recreation in the arts.”<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the permanence of *ren* within a person is manifested in different ways among different situations, just as a tree’s roots may grow in different unique paths, and a sentence may be differently phrased or structured in grammar for each situation, so is *li* also relative, but *ren* unfettered, firm, and resolute.

Fan Ch’ih asked about benevolence. The Master said, ‘While at home hold yourself in a respectful attitude; when serving in an official capacity be reverent; when dealing with others do your best. These are qualities that cannot be put aside, even if you go and live among the barbarians.’<sup>58</sup>

It is in and through *li*, that we find the concreteness and reality of *ren*, of which, “The Master said, ‘Love your fellow men.’”<sup>59</sup> This love, however, as we have previously discussed, finds its moral balance with the virtue of *yi*, which gives *li* its form.

#### IV. 君子 *Jun Zi*

The sage is never sullied. That is why the call of the Master Kong is for the Man of *ren* to enter public office,<sup>60</sup> and to ignore this call is to ignore one’s duty. So long as he has *ren*, even if he serves, in virtue of *yi*, he is not sullied. As “The Master said, ‘What the gentleman seeks, he seeks within himself; what the small man seeks, he seeks in others.’”<sup>61</sup> Regardless thus of the external disorder present in society, the *Jun Zi* finds calmness and serenity within himself. Another passage, which supports this, is when: “The Master said, ‘The gentleman is at ease without being arrogant; the small man is arrogant without being at ease.’”<sup>62</sup>

Indeed for Confucius, the solution to chaos and disorder is not outright refusal that is marked by the hermit’s or mystic’s withdrawal from society, but neither is it to succumb to it, but the courage to fight the system in spite of the system. Because “as for putting the Way into practice, he [*Jun Zi*] knows all along that it is hopeless,”<sup>63</sup> yet even then, the *Jun Zi* stands above this impossibility, because no matter what circumstance, the purity of his

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<sup>57</sup> 7:6, D.C. Lau.

<sup>58</sup> 13:19, D.C. Lau.

<sup>59</sup> 12:22, D.C. Lau.

<sup>60</sup> 18:7, D.C. Lau.

<sup>61</sup> 15:21, D.C. Lau.

<sup>62</sup> 13:26, D.C. Lau.

<sup>63</sup> 18:7, D.C. Lau. Clarification mine.

character would remain untarnished. In fact, the following passage suggests that it is not *Jun Zi* who is influenced; rather, it is he who influences with his strength of will: "The Master wanted to settle amongst the Nine Barbarian Tribes of the east. Someone said, 'But could you put up with their uncouth ways?' The Master said, 'Once a gentleman settles amongst them, what uncouthness will there be?'"<sup>64</sup>

But if the 君子 *Jun Zi* is a man of internal calmness and strength, unsullied and unfettered, why the need for refinement, why the need to show others if he is, in himself, secure of his internal character? A disciple of the Master asked this as well:

Chi Tzu-ch'eng said, 'The important thing about the gentleman is the stuff he is made of. What does he need refinement for?' Tzu-kung commented, 'It is a pity that the gentleman should have spoken so about the gentleman. "A team of horses cannot catch up with one's tongue." The stuff is no different from refinement; refinement is no different from the stuff. The pelt of a tiger or a leopard, shorn of hair, is no different from that of a dog or a sheep.'<sup>65</sup>

Indeed, because whatever is inside, must necessarily show outside. The awareness of *ren*, must necessarily be followed by its expression in *li*, with *yi* as its form.

*Jun Zi* thus is a man of *ren*,<sup>66</sup> of *yi*,<sup>67</sup> perfected and refined, that is, precisely made a *Jun Zi* through the practice of *li*. All this is in him when he practices *li* to perfection because: "The Master said, 'Virtue never stands alone. It is bound to have neighbours.'"<sup>68</sup> Indeed, the primary Confucian virtues cannot each stand alone; all of them are connected and interdependent upon each other. Moreover, "The Master said, 'The gentleman is no vessel.'"<sup>69</sup> This is to say that the *Jun Zi* is no specialist, designed for a specific purpose. He is the embodiment of all virtues, and because all virtues come from *Tian*, therefore, it necessarily follows that *Jun Zi* is the embodiment of *Tian*. As Wing-tsit Chan notes: "The sage aspires to become Heaven, the worthy aspires to become a sage, and the gentleman aspires to become a worthy."<sup>70</sup>

<sup>64</sup> 9:15, D.C. Lau.

<sup>65</sup> 12:8, D.C. Lau.

<sup>66</sup> 4:5, D.C. Lau.

<sup>67</sup> 4:16, 5:16, D.C. Lau.

<sup>68</sup> 4:25, D.C. Lau.

<sup>69</sup> 2:12, D.C. Lau.

<sup>70</sup> Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), 470.

This is also why in the last passage of the *Lun yu*: “Confucius said, ‘A man has no way of becoming a gentleman unless he understands Destiny; he has no way of taking his stand unless he understands the rites; he has no way of judging men unless he understands words.’”<sup>71</sup> Man is, again, therefore, cultivated in *li* and by understanding *li*, gains the ability for the expression of 仁 *ren* and his firmness of character, towards the direction of *yi*, the ideal of objective morality cemented by the existence of community.

It is, however, in the following verse in the *Lun yu* where *li* would stand as a very place where *Jun Zi* is cultivated despite *li* being a supplementary instrument to both 仁 *ren* and *yi*: “Tzu-chang said, ‘One can, perhaps, be satisfied with a Gentleman who is ready to lay down his life in the face of danger, who does not forget what is right at the sight of gain, and who does not forget reverence during a sacrifice nor sorrow while in mourning.’”<sup>72</sup>

If one is able to follow *yi* through *li*, one is also able to uphold *ren*, because he is also aware of his *yi*. This is most concretely mentioned in the *Lun yu*, where: “The Master said, ‘The gentleman widely versed in culture but brought back to essentials by the rites can, I suppose, be relied upon not to turn against what he stood for.’”<sup>73</sup>

## Epilogue

*Ren* is the root and most important virtue of Confucian philosophy, which precludes the moral system of the Master, but it is counterbalanced as well as complemented by *yi*. The interplay, however, of Love and Discipline, is perfected by the *Jun Zi*, a man of *li*, who in doing the proper rituals and social conduct, also shows his ability to empathize with and respect others, as well as his ability to fulfill his moral duty to society as a good citizen and member of the community. By carrying with it, necessarily all the other virtues, *li* becomes a locus for the cultivation of *Jun Zi*, the perfection of man as a moral project, able to express *ren*, able to understand and work towards *yi*.

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<sup>71</sup> 20:3, D.C. Lau.

<sup>72</sup> 19:1, D.C. Lau.

<sup>73</sup> 6:27, D.C. Lau.



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