

THE
WISDOM
OF
CONFUCIUS

Edited and translated

with notes by

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Tseyi Shuncheng by Tai Chen, 1723-1777). No one, apart from Western scholars, has even compiled a collection of all Confucius' descriptions of "the superior man." This most important conception forms a composite picture of the qualities of this "superior man." In this chapter I have selected probably one-fourth of the contents of the *Analects* and regrouped them according to certain ideas. Unless otherwise indicated, the sayings are all by Confucius and are taken from the *Analects*. Where necessary, however (e.g., for a clearer statement of the humanistic position), I have drawn upon Chapters XXVIII, XXIX, XXX, XXXII and XXXIII of the *Liki*—about a dozen passages, all told. Chapters XXXII and XXXIII, in particular differ not in the slightest as regards contents and style from the *Analects*, and are extremely rich in records of Confucius' sayings.

I. DESCRIPTION OF CONFUCIUS BY HIMSELF AND OTHERS

Duke Yeh (of Ch'u) asked Tselu about Confucius, and Tselu did not make a reply. Confucius said, "Why didn't you tell him that I am a person who forgets to eat when he is enthusiastic about something, forgets all his worries when he is happy, and is not aware that old age is coming on?"

Tselu was stopping for the night at the Stone Gate and the gate-keeper asked him, "Where are you from?" "I'm from Confucius," replied Tselu. "Oh, is he the fellow who knows that a thing can't be done and still wants to do it?"

Weisheng Mou said to Confucius, "Why are you so self-important and constantly rushing about? Don't you talk a little bit too much?" "It isn't that I want to talk. It's because I hate (the present moral chaos)."

Confucius said, "At fifteen I began to be seriously interested in study. At thirty I had formed my character. At forty I had no more perplexities. At fifty I knew the will of heaven. At sixty nothing that I heard disturbed me.* At seventy I could let my thought wander without trespassing the moral law."

Yen Huei and Tselu were sitting together with Confucius, and Confucius said, "Why don't you each tell me your ambitions in life?" Tselu replied, "It is my ambition in life to go about with a horse and carriage and a light fur coat and share them with my good friends until they are all worn out without any regret." Yen Huei said, "It is my ambition never to show off and never to brag about myself." Then Tselu said, "May I hear what is your ambition?" And Confucius replied, "It is my ambition that the old people should be able to live in peace, all friends should be loyal and all young people should love their elders."

There were the famous recluses, Poyi, Shuch'i, Yuchung, Yiyi, Chuchang, Liuhsia Huei and Shaolien. Confucius said, "Not to compromise with their own ideals and not to be disgraced—these were Poyi and Shuch'i." He said of Liuhsia Huei and Shaolien that

* Here is an example of the great responsibility and room for conjecture on the part of a translator of ancient texts. The original text merely consists of two works "Ears accord."

they compromised with their ideals and were disgraced, but that they managed to be able to maintain a standard in their words and their conduct. He said of Yuchung and Yiyi that they escaped from society and were unconventional or untrammelled in their speech, and that they were able to live a clean private life and to adjust themselves according to the principle of expediency in times of chaos. "I am different from these people; I decide according to the circumstances of the time, and act accordingly."*

A great official asked Tsekung, "Is the Master a Sage? Why is it that he is so many-sided?" Tsekung replied, "Heaven has sent him to become a Sage, and he is many-sided, to boot." When Confucius heard this he said, "Perhaps this great official knows me well. I was a poor man's son and can therefore do many things that belong to a common man. Does a superior man have to learn all these things? No, he doesn't." Tsechang said, "Confucius said, 'I did not enter the government, that was how I had time for learning the arts.'"

Confucius said, "There is pleasure in lying pillowed against a bent arm after a meal of simple vegetables with a drink of water. On the other hand, to enjoy wealth and power without coming by it through the right means is to me like so many floating clouds."

* Literally, in five words, "No may, no may not." Later Mencius fully commented upon this, saying that Confucius was a great flexible character, acting according to the requirements of the occasion. He could be an official if necessary, and he could refuse to be an official if necessary. In contrast with the other recluses mentioned, there was a positive urge in his character, as well as a philosophic resignation.

Confucius said, "There are three things about the superior man that I have not been able to attain. The true man has no worries; the wise man has no perplexities; and the brave man has no fear." Tsekung said, "But, Master, you are exactly describing yourself."

Confucius said, "In the study of literature, I am probably as good as anyone, but personally to live the life of the superior man, I don't think I have succeeded."

Confucius said, "As to being a sage and a true man, I am not so presumptuous. I will admit, however, that I have unceasingly tried to do my best and to teach other people."

Confucius said, "Do you think I know a great deal? I don't. There was an uneducated man who asked me about something, and I couldn't say a word in reply. I merely discussed the two sides of the question and was at my wit's end."

Confucius said, "In every hamlet of ten families, there are always some people as honest and faithful as myself, but none who is so devoted to study."

Confucius said, "I may perhaps compare myself to my old friend Laop'eng. I merely try to describe (or carry on) the ancient tradition, but not to create something new. I only want to get at the truth and am in love with ancient studies."

Confucius said, "To silently appreciate a truth, to learn continually and to teach other people unceasingly—that is just natural with me."

"The things that trouble or concern me are the following: lest I should neglect to improve my character, lest I

should neglect my studies, and lest I should fail to move forward when I see the right course, or fail to correct myself when I see my mistake."

Confucius said, "I'm not born a wise man. I'm merely one in love with ancient studies and work very hard to learn them."

Confucius said, "Ah Sze, do you suppose that I merely learned a great deal and tried to remember it all?" "Yes, isn't that what you do?" "No," said Confucius, "I have a system or a central thread that runs through it all."

Confucius said, "There are some people who do not understand a subject, but go ahead and invent things out of their own head. I am not like those people. One can come to be a wise man by hearing a great deal and following the good, and by seeing a great deal and remembering it."

Confucius said, "Sometimes I have gone the whole day without food and a whole night without sleep, occupied in thinking and unable to arrive at any results. So I decided to study again."

Confucius said, "Whenever walking in a company of three, I can always find my teacher among them (or one who has something to teach me). I select a good person and follow his example, or I see a bad person and correct it in myself."

Confucius said, "I won't teach a man who is not anxious to learn, and will not explain to one who is not trying to make things clear to himself. And if I explain one-fourth and the man doesn't go back and reflect and

think out the implications in the remaining three-fourths for himself, I won't bother to teach him again."

Confucius said, "There was never yet a person who came to me with the present of dried meat (equivalent of tuition) that I have refused to teach something."

The young men of a certain village Hu were given to mischief, and one day some young people from that village came to see Confucius, and the disciples were surprised that Confucius saw them. Confucius said, "Don't be too hard on people. What concerns me is how they come, and not what they do when they go away. When a man approaches me with pure intentions, I respect his pure intentions, although I cannot guarantee what he does afterwards."

Confucius was in difficulties at K'uang and he said, "Since King Wen died, is not the tradition of King Wen in my keeping or possession? If it be the will of Heaven that this moral tradition should be lost, posterity shall never again share in the knowledge of this tradition. But if it be the will of Heaven that this tradition shall not be lost, what can the people of K'uang do to me?"

Confucius said, "Heaven has endowed me with a moral destiny (or mission). What can Huan T'uei (a military officer who was driving him away) do to me?"*

Confucius said, "Give me a few more years to finish the study of the *Book of Changes*, then I hope I shall be able to be free from making serious mistakes (or errors of judgment)."

* See Chapter II, Section 4, for fuller details.

These were the things Confucius often talked about: Poetry, history, and the performance of ceremonies—all these were what he often talked about.

Confucius seldom talked about profit or destiny or true manhood.*

Confucius did not talk about monsters, physical exploits, unruly conduct and the heavenly spirits.

Confucius taught four things: Literature, personal conduct, being one's true self and honesty in social relationships.

Confucius fished with a fishing rod, but would not use a net. While shooting he would not shoot a bird at rest.†

Confucius denounced or tried to avoid completely four things: arbitrariness of opinion, dogmatism, narrow-mindedness and egotism.

Confucius was gentle but dignified, austere yet not harsh, polite and completely at ease.

Yen Hwei heaved a sigh and said, "You look up to it and it seems so high. You try to drill through it and it seems so hard. You see to see it in front of you, and all of a sudden it appears behind you. The Master is very good at gently leading a man along and teaching him. He taught me to broaden myself by the reading of literature and then to control myself by the observance of proper

* There is no other topic which Confucius and his disciples more constantly talked about than "true manhood." See below Section 6. This is therefore a palpable falsehood, unless it means that Confucius refused to admit that many persons whom his disciples admired could be called "true men."

† Both being unfair.

conduct. I just felt being carried along, but after I have done my very best, or developed what was in me, there still remains something austere standing apart, uncatchable. Do what I could to reach his position, I can't find the way."

Shusun Wushu said to the officials at court, "Tsekung is a better man than Confucius." Tsefu Chingpo told this to Tsekung, and Tsekung said, "It is like the matter of housewalls. My housewall comes up only to the shoulder, and the people outside are therefore able to see my beautiful house, whereas the wall of Confucius is twenty or thirty feet high, and unless you go right inside, you do not see the beauty of its halls and the grandeur of its furniture. But there are very few people who can penetrate inside that household. What Shusun says is therefore perfectly easy to understand."

Again Shusun Wushu tried to belittle the greatness of Confucius, and Tsekung said, "There is no use trying. Confucius cannot be belittled. Other great men are like mounds or hillocks which you can climb up, but Confucius is like the moon and the sun, which you can never reach. A man can shut his eyes to the sun and the moon, but what harm can it do to the sun and the moon? You are just trying to do the impossible."

II. THE EMOTIONAL AND ARTISTIC LIFE OF CONFUCIUS

When Yen Hwei died, Confucius wept bitterly and his followers said, "You are all shaken up." Confucius said, "Am I all shaken up? But if I don't feel all shaken up