

VII
SEVENTH COUPLET

玉不琢 . 不成器 : 人不學 . 不知義
yü⁴ pu^{4.5} chuo^{2.5} . pu^{4.5} ch'eng² ch'i⁴
jen² pu^{4.5} hsioh^{2.5} . pu^{4.5} chih¹ yi⁴

Rhyme : 寔 chih⁴ “to discard, reject”.

Notice: A rough, unpolished piece of jade looks like an ordinary pebble. It is easy to pass it over and to discard it.

Translation:

Jade which is not polished does not make a vessel;
a man who has not studied, does not know what is right.

Quotation:

The sentence is quoted literally from the *Li chi*, Hsioh chi, *HY*. 18/2 (C., II, p. 28-29), except that, for the sake of the rhyme, the original 道 tao⁴ was replaced by yi⁴: cf. below, # 7-A-B. This maxim has already been quoted twice: in # 3₁-B, second allusion (ornatus), and in the Mencius pericope quoted in # VI, allusion.

Notice:

For Greeks or Romans of antiquity, for Buddhists and Hindoos alike, and for Confucianists of course, there can be no doubt: *a man who has not studied, does not know what is right*. On the other hand there obviously exist men who did study, yet are wicked. How this can be, no philosopher was able to explain: it is a scandal comparable to, in ancient Greece, a man beautiful, yet evil; or, in China, a scoundrel possessed of a beautiful handwriting. However it is equally clear that no man can be righteous without being learned. The discovery that moral excellence is independent of learning, is one of the great feats of Christianity: you may be a saint

regardless of whether you are learned or ignorant, one of the shepherds, or one of the magi.

Master Wang's Commentary

7-A

義 . 道 義 也

yi⁴ : tao⁴ yi⁴ yeh³

The word equation is aimed at glossing over the alteration of the *Li chi* wording operated for rhyme's sake in # VII.

> 道 義 is a *pars pro toto* meaning, quite generally, “righteous behaviour”: *MTH.*, 6136 “morality”. According to *M.*, 11.39010.100, it comprises 道 tao⁴, and 德 te^{2.5}, and 義 yi⁴, and 理 li³ (cf. *infra*, # 7-Cb), viz. *W.* 160A, *W.* 100, *W.* 71Q, respectively; as for 理, not listed in *W.*, see *Cd. sub voc.* p. 508 a-b.

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7-B

禮 經 學 記 曰

玉 不 琢 . 不 成 器 : 人 不 學 . 不 知 道

li³ ching¹ hsioh^{2.5} chi⁴ yüeh^{1.5}

yü⁴ pu^{4.5} chuo^{2.5} . pu^{4.5} ch'eng² ch'i⁴

jen² pu^{4.5} hsioh^{2.5} . pu^{4.5} chih¹ tao⁴

This is the correct wording of the *Li chi*.

Translation:

Cf. *supra*, # VII.

Notice on 玉 :

a) In Chinese mythology: “jade” is the “royal” stone. The kanji is derived (轉注) from 王 that links together the three 才 ts'ai², viz. heaven, earth, and man (*W.* 83A). Jade is sperm lost by a dragon, hence it is white. It becomes green through

contact with the human skin. Jade is the *materia sexualis*: it grants benevolence (仁) to the mandarin, as well as fertility to the women, to cattle and to the land in general, hence prosperity and happiness. “Jade gate”, “jade stalk”, &c., are euphemisms for the human genitals. “To polish jade”, as an allusion to the present apophthegm, refers among adults to the laborious process of educating boys (cf. the *MENCIUS* quotation of # VI); and among boys it means “masturbation”. It means any type of genital activity (cf. below, # 7-Ca).

b) In nature: “Jade” is an ill-defined substance, in fact any stone which is milky, translucent, glassy, and glossy when polished; colour is of minor concern. It is found in the river beds of the Kun-lun mountains, north of Tibet, and of the “Golden Triangle” in south-east Asia. It is remarkable that an exotic substance, only to be found thousands of miles away, could acquire such central importance in Chinese civilization. It suggests an immigration from central America where “jade” is abundant and used in a fashion similar to China: fertility charms, apotropaic amulets, insignia of authority, &c., including a covering fit for royal corpses. Since demand drives the market, these potential American immigrants, in need of some similar material, were offered “jade” by central and south-east Asian traders. The Chinese “jade mystique” constitutes one more circumstantial evidence for important early cultural contacts, if not outright immigration, from central America to east Asia (carried over the Pacific ocean by the northern Passat drift). Obvious similarities in decorative art motifs may constitute an other important pieces of evidence.

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7-C

a) 雖有美玉 . 不琢不磨 . 不成器物 . 則無所用

sui¹ yu³ mei³ yü⁴ . pu^{4.5} chuo^{2.5} pu^{4.5} mo² . pu^{4.5} ch'eng² ch'i⁴
wu^{4.5} . tse^{2.5} wu² so³ yung⁴

b) 猶人 . 雖有美材 . 不勤學問 . 則不能知理義道德
 yu² jen² : sui¹ yu³ mei³ ts'ai² . pu^{4.5} ch'in² hsioh^{2.5} wen⁴ . tse^{2.5}
 pu^{4.5} neng² chih¹ . li³ yi⁴ tao⁴ te^{2.5}

This is the text as given by VIE and Sc; dM omits the line a) and starts where the double entendre ends 雖有美材 .

a) *Although it is a fine piece of jade, if it is not polished, not rubbed, it does not become a utensil. Consequently it is of no use.*

b) *Likewise men: even if possessed of fine talents, if we do not pursue learning diligently, we cannot attain knowledge of rationality and equity, nor of the ways and means.*

7-Ca: Repeated for the second time, the initial simile seems redundant. It has, however, two functions.

– First function: it traces the simile to Mencius (cf. above # VI, Allusion): 玉人彫琢之 “the jade worker cuts and polishes it” (cf. *MTH.*, 6273.12).

– Second function: it attracts our attention to the double-entendre of “jade polishing” (cf # 7-B Notice). Through a slight change of the punctuation, one obtains:

雖有美玉 . 不琢不磨 . 不成器物 . 則無所用猶 :
 人雖有美才...

Although one may be endowed with a handsome “jade”, if it is not polished, not rubbed, it does not make a tool: it is a “little monkey” of no use. Man, although possessed of fine talents...

Notice that, of the two kanjis used by Mencius, Master Wang has retained 琢 “to polish”; as for 彫 “to carve, to tattoo”, he replaced it appositely by 磨 “to rub”. Notice also, that the expression 玉人 “a jade person” is ambiguous: it means “a jade carver”; it also means “a prostitute” (cf. *BISCHOFF, Haenisch*, lesson # 31, where the same topic is treated, and tiao¹ dropped).

7-Cb: The idea behind this sentence echoes the eighth verse of Ssu-ma Kuang’s *Song* (cf. # 6-B): a natural talent occurs seldom enough, and when it occurs it still needs to be

developed (cf. 1₁-H, the *Lun yü* quotation with which Master Wang closes his commentary to # I₁).

> 知 chih¹ “to know”, same meaning as in the *Li chi* quotation of # 7-B (as opposed to “to desire, to wish for” of the *MENCIUS* pericope quoted in # 6-B to which the expression 學問 refers us once again).

N.B.: 知 and 德 do not rhyme here: 知 meaning “to know” is pronounced chih¹ and rhymes 支 chih¹ “the rod”; 德 meaning “potency, virtue” or “means, resources”, is pronounced te^{2.5} and rhymes 職 chih⁵ “a public office”; but both kanjis do rhyme 寘 chih⁴ when they are used for 智 chih⁴ “a sage”, and 置 chih⁴ “to establish”, respectively (*M.*, 8.23935, and 4.10243).

> 寘 chih⁴ : it means, like so many kanjis, one thing and its contrary too, namely “to discard” and “to establish”, which, in the present context, constitutes a meaningful alternative (in the rhyme of # VII, and here, in # 7-C, alike).

> 理義道德 appears to be a current saying not to be found in the Classics. It is mentioned in *M.*, 11.39010.100 as the components of “morality”, but without textual reference. (Was it perhaps taken from the present # 7-C and turned into a current saying ?)

Quotations:

The tetranome is composed of two quotations: 理義 / 道德.

First quotation:

理義 : *MENCIUS*, *HY.* 44/6A/7 (*C.*, p.568; *L.*, p. 406-407):

聖人先得我心之所同然耳：故理義之悅我心 ...
 ... *The sages discovered long ago that on which our mind agrees in general. Hence rationality and equity is pleasant to our soul, just as meat (...) is pleasant to our mouth.*

Meaning: “rationality and equity” is that on which human hearts generally agree; their principles were discovered and formulated by the sages of antiquity. Hence: you must study them.

Second quotation:

道 德 : *Li chi*, Wang chih, *HY*. 5/42 (C., I, p. 297, beginning of chap. 3, art. 4):

一 道 德 以 同 俗

The minister of public education enacted the six ceremonies in order to foster the character of the subjects; he elucidated the seven teachings in order to enhance public morals; he imposed the eight regulations in order to repress public immorality; *he unified the ways and means in order to harmonize the popular customs*; and he fed the old, and protected widows and orphans, &c.

Notice: In addition to what was said in # VII concerning “*a man who is not learned, does not know what is right*”, an accurate knowledge of “rationality and equity” and of “the ways and means” was absolutely essential for anyone who was to become a mandarin. The mandarin was essentially a warrant of the State orthodoxy, hence, a teacher and a magistrate in charge of enforcing law and order in accordance with the prevailing customs.

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7-D

終 不 可 謂 成 人 也

chung¹ pu^{4.5} k'o³ wei⁴ ch'eng² jen² yeh³

... *and never can he be considered an Accomplished Man.*

> 成 人 means:

- In ordinary language “an adult man”, namely an upper-class adult supposed to act in a responsible manner; “to become an adult, to act as an adult” and, applicable to the present context “to succeed in life” (*MTH.*, 379.7; same *R.*, 5431; *M.*, 5.11544.173; cf. also # I₁, Ode 70, commentary to Stanza 1, v. 3-4).
- In a restricted sense, and certainly not applicable here, “Accomplished man” is a title given to high ranking Taoists (cf. Bischoff, *Orchis*, p. 22-23), such as, in the *Chin P'ing Mei*, the court eunuch Huang Lu, not yet 30 years of age (cf.

in particular chap. 66, the poetic description of his superhuman beauty).

- Closer to the present context is the definition of *Lun yü*, *HY*. 28/14/12 (*C.*, p. 224-225; *L.*, p. 279-280). This logion gives:

a) for the Antiquity, an admittedly unrealistic combination of the excellence of diverse paragons;

b) for present times, a realistic and, actually, quite beautiful definition:

“... *who in the view of gain thinks of righteousness; who in the view of danger is prepared to give up his life; and who does not forget an old agreement however far back it extends: such a man may be reckoned a COMPLETE man.*” (cf. *LEGGE*) One is reminded of that one man who, at the moment of the T’ien-an-men massacre, stepped forward and stopped the column of tanks. Was he not a 成人? And the tank driver? True, the bundles which the man carried under both arms may have contained explosives.

Quotation:

成人: Master Wang, however, is quoting the *Li chi*, Kuan yi 冠義 “the Capping ceremony”, *HY*. 43 (*C.*, II, p. 636-640). This short, but important, chapter stands appropriately between the 大學, Ta hsioh “the Great Learning”, and the 昏義, Hun yi “the Wedding Ceremony”. It starts with the statement:

凡人之所以爲人者 . 禮義也

What makes a man to be a man are Ceremonies and Justice.

Referring to verse # VII, we may recall that “*a man, who is not learned, does not know what is right*”. Indeed, *li* and *yi* must be thought of as a pattern, as a codified set of social behaviour (for a definition of *li*, cf. # 2-A); and nobody, not even Confucius, can know *li* and *yi* without having studied them (cf. # 2-B). The Capping ceremony is a “commencement” that marks the fact that the young man has mastered *li* and *yi*, and that he is henceforth to be considered a 成人 “a COMPLETE man” as Legge puts it; or, preferably, “*un homme fait*”, according to Couvreur, and rendered here as

“Accomplished Man”, capitalized, since it is a sort of title conferred during that ceremony.

成人之者. 將責成人禮焉也: 責成人禮焉者. 將責爲人子. 爲人弟爲人臣. 爲人少者之禮行焉: 將責四者之行於人. 其禮可不重與: 故孝弟忠順之行立. 而後可以爲人: 可以爲人而後可以治人也

(5, p. 639) *Those who (者) are [to declare] him (之) an Accomplished Man will judge (責) whether [the candidate did effectively] accomplish (成) [the duties of a mature] individual (人) in accordance with [the standards of] the Ceremonies (禮焉). When judging the fulfillment (成) [of the duties of a mature] individual (人) in accordance with the Ceremonies (禮焉) they were to judge, whether [in fulfillment] of the human [duties], be it as a son, be it as a younger brother, be it as a subject, or as a junior, [the candidate] has acted in accordance with the Ceremonies. This [part of the Capping] ceremony in which one will judge whether [the candidate] fulfilled [these] four social [obligations], is to be given utmost importance. (6) Once it has been established that [the candidate] has practiced filial piety, brotherly submission, loyalty, and deference, only then does it become licit to regard and to treat [him] as a Man. As it has become licit to regard and to treat [him] as a Man, it becomes licit [for him] to govern other men.*

> 責 tse^{2.5}. means 1) “to investigate, to judge”; 2) “(to impose) a duty, a responsibility”. Couvreur has opted for the latter acceptancy; I opted for the former. I understand that the lad had to show and prove an irreproachable conduct which would merit his “being capped”. In other words, the “duties and responsibilities” were not imposed during the Capping ceremony (which would be awfully late); but to have accomplished them consistently during adolescence was prerequisite for being declared an “Accomplished Man”; or rather: “a man who accomplishes [the human duties according to the standards of *li*³]”.

> 焉 *yen*¹ “how?, in what way?”; here: *yen*² may form adverbs, hence “ceremoniously”, or rather “in accordance with the Ceremonies”.

Master Wang changed the original 可以爲人 into the 可謂成人. This betrays a change in the definition of “man”. The *Li chi* presents us the Capping as the sacrament operating an ontological change in the young male: by virtue of this sacrament, a person is changed from a lad into a man. The ritual shows us the ontological status of “man” to be dependant on an appropriate social behaviour. Titel, cap, and friends’ name are the “substance” of the sacrament. In contrast, the Capping ceremony of later times marks but a change in the social status of one’s son. Title, cap and friends’ name are but signs for the new social status. An ontological change does not take place, no more than at an academic comencement.