Educating the Chinese Sages of the Ages: Is Confucius the Only Soul of China?

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Abstract

The Chinese sages of the ages developed philosophical foundations around three scholar as guiding interpretations for an ideal gentleman or superior person (in Chinese, junzi) in a society. These philosophers, namely Confucius, Mencius, and Laozi provided basic principles of Chinese traditions that evolved into a civilization. This paper explores the parallel debates and exchanges between these intellectual traditions, that have weaved various intellectual traditions through comparisons and intra-cultural conversations. It highlights classical tension within Chinese history, for instance between the wen (cultural attainment) and the wu (martial valor. It is intriguing to mention that despite differing opinions within Chinese intellectual traditions, the differing opinion never emerged as a distinct school of thought. In fact, Chinese intellectual traditions are viewed as embodied with cultural values emphasizing on virtue of harmony, benevolence, righteousness, morality, courtesy, wisdom, loyalty, courage and filial piety as guiding principles for societal co-existence.

Keywords: Ideal Man (Junzi), *Wen (*Cultural Attainment), *Wu* (Martial Valor), Confucianism, Mencius, Daoism.

Introduction

In the closing years of the Ming Dynasty, the grand secretary of the imperial bureaucracy described the empire's ills as "a separation of the interior from the exterior" and glumly predicted "a state under these conditions [cannot] remain in peace and order for long" (Huang, 1981, 48). While others have explained the secretary's words as diagnosing the debilitating moral conflict between public duty and self-interest that destabilized the ruling Ming bureaucracy, this paper focuses on a different tension within the civil bureaucracy, namely, the enduring stress between two models of masculine identity, the way of the wen versus the way of the wu. Kam Louie's broadly explained in theorising Chinese Masculinity the phenomenon in the context of cultural attainment for (wen) and martial valor for (wu), and these two typologies reflect centuries of intellectual and cultural influences (Louie, 2002, 4). On one hand, the Confucian tradition has dominated Chinese thought and practice, and on the other hand, the Daoism has played a pivotal role

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in formulating ideas of the public and private responsibilities of the ideal man. With Confucius and Mencius guiding our interpretation of the latter, and Laozi providing a foil as the chief figure of Daoism, this paper explores the perspectives of these three sages on the ideal man, as a means of shedding light on the classical tension in Chinese history between the wen and the wu.

Background

The Analects of Confucius serves as an ideal starting point for this study. However, it will not engage with a close analysis of the text until later since the Confucian classic provides one of the earliest backgrounds on the paradigm, the wen and wu, which is the focus of our interest. Like many key terms within the Analects, wen and wu have dual layers of meaning. On the surface, they refer to culture and militancy, refinement and valor, literature and physical strength. Yet for Confucius, they also evoke the founding kings of the Zhou dynasty (1122-256 BCE), King Wen (Wen Wang) and King Wu (Wu Wang). One of the Five Classics of the Confucian canon, the Book of Rites, summarizes the legacies of these two kings when it states, "King Wen used culture to rule and King Wu used military power" (Louie, 2002, 11). This use of historical cultural icons to represent wen and wu is a classic means of conveying the meaning of the terms. This is somewhat ironic, considering that Confucius himself would emerge as one of the two icons that would become enshrined as the definitive representatives of the wen and wu paradigm.

Irony aside, it is not surprising that the founder of China's most enduring school of thought is identified as the embodiment of wen, even serving today as the god of wen in temples throughout East Asia. The choice of the god of wu, Guan Yu, is more surprising and derives from the classic tale "Romance of the Three Kingdoms" (三國演義sānguó yǎnyì). In a story of heroes, Guan Yu stands out for his military exploits and, as discussed below, extraordinary self-discipline. Confucius and Guan Yu have served as the paragons for wen and wu for centuries, exploring their dual identities in more depth is an astute means of grasping the meaning of wen and wu.

Wu was understood to represent marital bravery and strength. In his cultural analysis of the wen-wun paradigm, Louie explains that the "wu was conceived of embodying seven virtues which together meant that degree of military authority sufficient to make further engagement unnecessary" (Louie, 2002, 14). This combination of military authority and self-restraint is exemplified in the character of Guan Yu. While other characters in Three Kingdoms are more successful in battle, Guan Yu is distinguished by his remarkable self-control and selfless loyalty. Both traits are captured by a famous incident in the novel when Guan Yu is forced by his antagonist Cao Cao to 'look after' the wives of his 'sworn brother' Liu Bei. Guan Yu proves his puritanical resilience and loyalty to Lie Bei when he spends the night outside the women's room reading from Confucian classics (Louie, 2002, 24; also see Hodge & Louie's The Politics of Chinese Language and Culture, 1998, 124).

The incident reveals much about expectations for the wu persona, with the presence of Confucian literary texts meriting special comment. The traditional interpretation stresses that even a highly charged wu figure like Guan Yu possesses scholarly wen characteristics. The paragon wen, is noted for possessing wu qualities as well (p.15). In both cases, the presence of both wen and wu is part of the Chinese holistic tradition that suggests both attributes are required for true mastery (Louie, 2002, 31).

While a balance of wen and wu does emerge from Confucian writings, there is no question that the way of wen predominates. As Louie explains "the cerebral male model tends to dominate that of the macho, brawny male" (2002, 8). While Guan Yu may be the more popular of the two gods, Confucian is far better known, and especially among the educated elite is more highly esteemed. His role as the god of wen was cemented by the adoption of Confucianism as the state orthodoxy by the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE). However it is the emergence of the scholar-bureaucrats in the Tang dynasty (618 – 907 CE) that truly elevated wen over wu. While under the Tang the ideal official was still largely a virile, martial wu-figure, by the end of the dynasty, civil officials openly denigrated the illiteracy and brutality of military officials (R.H. Van Gulik in Louie, 2002, 18). That sentiment remained in the following dynasty, as can be seen from a popular Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE) saying: "a good piece of metal does not become nails and a good man does not become a soldier" (Louie, 2002)). By the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE), the appearance of the ideal official had radically changed from prior dynasties. The new clean-shaven, younger man, however, would foreshadow the emergence of the *caizi*, the almost effeminate "fragile scholar" who became a representative of the ideal male during the ensuing Qing dynasty (1644-1912 CE). As R.H. Van Gulik explains, the control of the military by the foreign Manchu (the ruling class of the Qing) contributed to an even greater denigration of *wu* characteristic (Louie, 2002, 296).[1] This brief history lesson is only intended to highlight some of the tensions between *wen* and *wu* models for China's scholar-bureaucrats. R.H. Van Gulik provides a definition of wu. By contrast, what would be a good definition for wen? Louie suggests wen might be defined as "those gentile, refined qualities that were associated with literary and artistic pursuits of the classical scholars" (Louie, 2002, 14).

It is important to analyze the classical scholars and their characterization of the ideal man. This paper is an attempt to read the texts for what they say, rather than factor in the reams of secondary criticism that parse through Confucius, Mencius and Laozi, providing their own interpretations of the classics. For the novice scholar, engaging ancient Chinese texts necessitates relying upon translations, an especially challenging task when one is interested in particular terms and writers as poetic as Laozi. To help alleviate the burden of translation, an effort has been made by consulting multiple

[1] "Under the Manchu occupation the martial arts were monopolized by the conquerors, and as a reaction the Chinese, and more especially the members of the literary class, began to consider physical exercise as vulgar and athletic prowess as suited only to the 'Ch'ing barbarians'…the ideal lover is describe as a delicate hyper-sensitive youngster with page face and narrow shoulders, passing the greater part of his time dreaming among his books and flowers.

translations with the goal that their distinct interpretation contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the words of Confucius, Mencius and Laozi.

Universal Virtues for Confucius: Wisdom, Humanity and Courage

> *Confucius said, "The way of the superior man is threefold, but I have not been able to attain it. The man of wisdom has no perplexities; the man of humanity has no worry; the man of courage has no fear."*
> *Tzu-kung said, "You are talking about yourself."*
> *Analects 14:30 (trans. Chan, 1963, p. 43)*

Confucius was introduced above as a paragon of the intellectual scholar, the selfless official whose philosophy was made sacrosanct and divine over the course of Chinese history. His life is far more modest apart from a brief period as an official with the State of Lu, his perspectives on governance and behavior were largely unheeded during his lifetime. It was an age of violence and freedom of thought, the Spring and Autumn Period (722– 481 BCE), when power was decentralized between dozens of smaller states. While martial power was predominant, the importance of the scholar was not ignored.[2] Confucius's legacy was largely responsible for further elevating the power of the latter. Indeed he brought together the *shi* (knight) and *junzi* (scholar) in his teaching, redefining the former as a strict follower of Confucian ethics, an advocate and seeker of the ideal persona exemplified within the latter term.

It is difficult to downplay the centrality of the *junzi* to Confucian thought. The term itself appears 106 times in the *Analects* alone, not to mention countless more times in the Book of Rites and other collections of Confucian sayings (Louie, 2002, 44). While Confucius is quoted advocating *wu* pursuits such as archery and horseback riding, the preponderance of association is certainly with *wen*. Verse 25, book VI of the *Analects* provides perhaps the clearest example, when Confucius says "the *junzi* is well-versed in *wen*" (Bojun, 1958, 68). A more elaborate contrast between the two characteristics can be found in verse 25, book III when Confucius says "the succession dance is perfect beauty and at the same time perfect goodness; but the *wu* dance is perfect beauty but not perfect goodness" (Waley, 1938, 101). As Louie explains, the contrast is between the succession process of King Sun, who ascended the throne of Xia through virtuous means, and the succession process of King Wu, who founded the Zhou dynasty through brute military force (Waley, 1938, 18).[3] A more sophisticated description of *wen* occurs in verse 16, book VI, when Confucius says "when substance exceeds *wen*, one becomes rude. When

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[2] Louie (2002) notes that the Tang scholar Lu Chu [cited in D. L. McMullen's "The Cult of Ch'I T'ai-kung and T'ang Attitudes to the Military," *T'ang Studies* 7 (1989), p. 68] writes that the ideal balance between *wen* and *wu* was achieved during the Spring and Autumn period, "the officers of the armies were the same as the ministers; those who held the great levels of administration were the supreme commanders of the armies." This situation, according to Lu Chun, then changed, with the military predominating and becoming increasingly exclusive during the Warring States period.

[3] Louie (2002) also quotes an extract from the Confucian Classic *Spring and Autumn Annals*: "The virtues of the wen are superior, the greatness of *wu* is lower, and this has always and will always be the case."

wen exceeds substance, one becomes urbane. It is only when one's substance and *wen* are properly blended that he becomes the *junzi*" (Chan, 1963, 29).

While *wen* is a significant component of the *junzi*, it by no means can capture the ideal Confucian man in its entirety. Three more characteristics must be considered: *ren*, *li*, and *yi*. *Ren* is undoubtedly the most fundamental quality necessary for the *junzi* to lead a moral life. Variously translated as humanity or benevolence, the term is best understood as the practice of treating others in a morally upright and equitable manner, i.e. treat others the way you want to be treated.).[4] Two verses are helpful in fleshing out the role of *ren* for the *junzi*:

> *The junzi is devoted to the root. When the root is firmly established, the moral law (the Dao) will grow. Filial piety and brotherly respect are the root of ren. I. 2 (trans. Chan, 1963, 20)*
> *The junzi never abandons ren, even for the lapse of a single meal. In a moment of haste, he acts according to it. In times of difficulty or confusion, he acts according to it. V. 4 (trans. Chan, 1963, 26)*

Social deference and loyalty define *ren*. And the *junzi*'s constant attachment to *ren* define him and likewise defines the fundamentally humanistic ethics of Confucianism.[5] These are the essential concepts of *ren* that the *junzi* must accept completely. After ren, li is the key principle for the junzi. The term connotes propriety and ritual correctness. Sincerity, especially verbal sincerity (the rectification of names, cheng ming), along with the doctrine of the mean, is a key expression of this principle in action. From the following verses about li, one can understand how ren operates through the limitations of li, creating a tension that according to F. W. Mote "remains symbolic of the tensions within Confucian thought" (1988, 42). He who does not understand the will of Heaven cannot be regarded as a junzi, he who does not know li cannot take his stand, he who does not understand words cannot understand people. XX. 3 (trans. Waley, 1938, 233).

The junzi uses only that language that is proper for speech, and only speaks of what it would be proper to carry into effect. The junzi, in what he says, leaves nothing to chance. XIII.3 (trans. Waley, 1938, 172). How can the *junzi* know the will of Heaven? In the same way he can know his own will and know the will of others, and is responsible for his action, actions that he shapes with every word he speaks and steps he takes. The concept of the rectification of names is essentially about verbal sincerity, authenticating that one's speech does not exceed one's actions. Such principles essentially guide the *junzi* in realizing *ren*, ensuring that *ren* is practiced meaningfully and within the bounds of human capability.[6] The final key characteristic of the junzi is yi. As the moral consciousness of the junzi, yi is often translated as 'righteousness.' As the following verses suggest, yi must connote both a moral sensibility and an aspiration for righteousness since the junzi is first and foremost a moral exemplar. The junzi considers

[4] "Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you" Analects XV.23 (trans: Chan, 1963).
[5] The humanism of Confucianism is best demonstrated in verse 28 book XV when Confucius says "It is man that can make the Way (Dao) great, and not the Way that can make man great." (Chan, 1960).
[6] The following verses in the *Analects* explicate verbal sincerity further: II.13, IV.24, and XV.22.

yi as the most important. When the junzi has courage but not yi, he becomes turbulent. When the inferior man (xioaren) has courage but not yi, he becomes a thief. XVII. 23 (trans. Chan, 1963, 47).

The junzi regards yi as the substance of everything. He practices it according to li. He brings it forth in modesty, and he carries it to its conclusion with faithfulness. He is indeed a junzi! XV. 17 (trans. Chan, 1963, 43). The first verse is especially interesting for levering yi over courage [yung]. While courage is one of the junzi's main characteristics, without yi the junzi risks losing his self-control. While the inferior man cannot be described as a representative of a wu personality, it is of interest to note that without yi, his fate is common thievery. Without a moral consciousness and desire for righteousness, courage is dangerous to the junzi and inferior man alike.

The Analects of Confucius have many more messages for the junzi. But the three key characteristics imparted to the ideal scholar-official – ren, li, and yi - form the basis for the moral exemplar who is expected to embody the lessons of ren, li and yi on behalf of society. Before moving onto to the second sage of Confucianism, let us ask the Analects to leave us with one last perspective on the junzi. Read closely, this final excerpt confirms that the three characteristics discussed above must be implemented for the sake of society. Furthermore, by making suggestive hints about a dual maternal sensitivity and paternal authority, this last excerpt suggests that the fundamentally male, ideal man of Chinese thought may, in fact, have a vibrant feminine consciousness; questions to consider and which we shall return to in our discussion of Laozi below:

> Tseng Tzu said:
> *A man who can be entrusted with an orphaned child, delegated with the authority over a whole state of one hundred li, and whose integrity cannot be violated even in the face of a great emergency- is such a man a junzi? He is a junzi indeed! VIII. 6 (trans. Chan, 1963, 33)*

Mencius Notion of Humane Benevolence

> *The great man does not insist that his words necessarily be truthful [at all times and under all circumstances] or his actions be necessarily resolute. He acts only according to righteousness [yi] IV.B.11 (trans. Chan 1963, 76)*

Although Confucius speaks constantly about the importance of ren, humane benevolence, he fails to clarify what it is about human nature that compels a person to choose ren. Hence, in the generation after his death the question of whether human nature is inherently positive, negative, or neutral was widely debated. Mencius, the second sage of Confucianism, argues decisively for the first position, insisting that human nature is innately good. According to Mencius, at birth everyone possesses the four attributes of benevolence [ren], righteousness [yi], propriety [li], and the capacity to discern good from bad [chi]. The key here is that since everyone shares these positive characteristics, a fundamental equality exists that grants everyone the potential to perfect selves. This

universal possibility of self-perfection is captured in Mencius's view that all people are potential sages and is an important affirmation of the essential humanism of Confucianism (Mote, 1998, 49).

The following passage from Mencius's self-titled classic captures the question of his era regarding human nature and provides the classic Mencius response:

> *Kung-tu Tzu asked, "We are all human beings. Why is it that some men become great and others become small?"*
> *Mencius said, "Those who follow the greater qualities in their nature become great men and those who follow the smaller qualities in their nature become small men". "But we are all human beings. Why is it that some follow their greater qualities and others follow their smaller qualities?" Mencius replied, "When our sense of sight and hearing are used without thought and are thereby obscured by material things, the material things act on the material senses and lead them astray. That is all. The function of the mind (xin 心) is to think. If we think, we will get the principles of things. If we do not, we will not get them. This is what Heaven has given to us. If we build up the nobler part of our nature, then the inferior part cannot overcome it. It is simply this that makes a man great. VI. A. 15 (trans. Chan, 1963, 59)*

D. C. Lau prefers a more literal understanding for the term xin 心, translating it as 'heart' rather than 'mind.' According to Lau, the concept of the 'thinking heart' is central to Mencius, as it distinguishes between components of human nature and the latent potential for greatness in man (1979, xiii-xv). Unlike animals, human beings have the ability to make decision based on thought rather than on desires (IV.B.19).

This ability is latent within all human beings, identified as the 'thinking heart.' For Mencius, thought invokes moral thinking, prioritizes virtues like *ren*, *li* and *yi* as the moral directives guiding man's daily activities. Intellectual thought, the thinking of the mind, is in this sense of far less importance.[7] The difference between the small man and the ideal man is that the latter grants the proper focuses on to his 'thinking heart,' to maintaining moral virtues; while the former, on the other hand, strays from his true heart and allows his life to be dominated by sensatory desires like any animal (see IV.B.12; VI.A.8, 10). In this sense, the *junzi* is truly the ideal man, deeply committed to the very virtues that make him human to begin with. However, "the *junzi* differs from other men in that he retains his heart…by means of *ren* and *li*" (Lau, 1979, 94).

The heart is also central to Mencius's conception of the *hao jan chi qi, '*the flood like *qi,'* a vital energy that pervades humanity and nature, regulating affective-cognitive processes as well as one's general well-being. While *qi* is the concept wherein Mencius most differs from Confucius,[8] the nuts and bolts of nurturing one's *qi* is thoroughly

[7] Learning, seemingly the domain of intellectual thinking, is designed, according to Mencius, "to go after this strayed heart" (VI.A.11), to deepen one's attachment to moral values.

[8] It is interesting how the regulation of *qi* parallels spiritual exercises described in early Chinese texts, such as the *Neiye* ("Inner Training") chapter of the *Guanzi* (4th-2nd centuries BCE).

Confucian, "born of accumulated *yi*"(II.A.2, trans. Lau 1979, 33). Mencius further explains that *qi* flows from the heart, "filling the body," and even manifesting itself with a radiant facial appearance (VII.A.21). Lau adds an important element to this analysis, noting that according to Mencius, courage depends on the cultivation of one's *qi*. Building off Confucius's brief words (*Analects* XVII.23) on the necessity of *yi* within courage, Mencius explains courage, whether physical or mental, is based on accumulating *yi*, that is consciously acting with a sense of moral purpose. For the imperial-official tension between *wen* and *wu* models of masculinity, Mencius's explanation of this Confucian concept is instructive for asserting that a *wu* virtue like courage is grounded in cultivating moral righteousness [*yi*]. Mencius quotes the disciple of Confucius as explaining "supreme courage" in the context of *qi* as "if, on looking within, one finds oneself to be in the wrong, then even though one's adversary be only a common fellow coarsely clad, one is bound to tremble with fear. But if one finds oneself in the right, one goes forward even against men in the thousands" (II.A.2, trans. Lau, 1979, 32). Courage, then, is just as much the property of the righteous sage as the most aggressive warrior.

Let us end our analysis of Mencius with the words the sage himself chooses to describe his greatest personal strengths. Mencius exclaims "I have an insight into words and I am good at cultivating my 'flood-like qi'" (II.A.2, trans. Lau, 1979, 33). It is intriguing to note the link between verbal skills and "flood-like qi. For the scholar-officials of imperial China, powers of suasion were often their only means of accomplishing tasks that custom and regulation disallowed the use of more assertive wu like actions. Mencius seems to suggest that the ideal man works within these limitations, nurturing his heart, qi and verbal powers together in a seamless blend of classic Confucian virtues like ren, xin and li.

Laozi's Conception of the Ideal Man

> By acting without force, all things will be in order. Dao-de Jing 3 (trans. Chan, 1963, 103)

While Confucianism was the dominant reference point in the lives of scholar-officials, our inquiry cannot rest without including the perspective of Laozi. Daoism was present in every facet of the imperial bureaucracy, serving as a foil for the more established Confucian ethic. Ironically, just as it is more difficult to ascertain the influence of Daoism on the lives of scholar-officials, so too it is a challenge to ask a few selected passages to speak for the totality of Laozi's conception of the ideal man. The Daoist tradition to which Laozi may be ascribed the title of first sage is fundamentally holistic, seeing in everything the 'oneness of the Way' that unites all reality and non-reality. Certainly the most essential element of Laozi's portrayal of the ideal man is his discussion of the *de* [virtue]. As the second term in the title of his classic word Dao-De Jing, the *de* represents the manifestation of the Way [Dao] within the individual. And because the Way obtained by a particular thing is necessarily unique, the *de* can be said

to be both, the universalizing and individuating factor, simultaneously connecting 'a thing' to the universal Way and distinguishing 'the thing' from anything else in reality (Chan, 1963, 11). Cultivating *de* thus means living according to characteristics shared by the Way. In addition to celebrating familiar Confucian virtues, particular emphasis is placed on traits like non-action, compliance and femininity. While we may hesitate to associate these characteristics with wen, it is clear that they are opposed to wu. The question to ascertain as we analyze several texts from the Dao-De Jing is if the ideal man that emerges is in fact biased in any particular direction vis-à-vis the wen and wu dialectic.

Non-action is surely the most fundamental characteristic for the ideal man of Laozi. After introducing the concept of the Way in the first section, the second section (trans. Chan, 1963, 101) states:

> *The sage manages affairs without action*
> *And spreads doctrines without words*
> *All things arise and he does not turn away from them*
> *He produces them but does not take possession of them*
> *He acts but does not rely on his own ability*
> *He accomplishes his task but does not take credit for it*
> *It is precisely because he does not claim credit for it that his accomplishment remain with him.*

While this passage clearly makes the case for non-action, what is perhaps the most significant is the effective result of what is seemingly a passive role in affairs. What distinguishes Laozi from a major Daoist thinker like Zhunagzi is a sustained interest in the well-being of society. Laozi says that the sage does "not turn away" from affairs, but "without action" he "manages affairs…produces…acts…accomplishes." Two questions must be asked: First, what does it mean to act without action? And second, how is it that through acting so unconventionally without concerted action an effective outcome is still achieved? While this passage does suggest answers to both our questions, before we discuss them let us first turn to two other characteristics of Laozi's ideal man, each of which should prove further clarity in resolving these questions.

Among the countless images used to define the Way, water stands out as a particularly expressive means of expressing the non-active manner in which the Way – and the Daoist typology of man – operate. In chapter 78 (Chan, 1963, 236), right near the very end of the text, Laozi writes:

> *The best man is like water.*
> *Water is good; it benefits all things and does not compete with them.*
> *It dwells in lowly places that all disdain.*
> *This is why it is so near to Tao.*

Like water, the ideal man acts in spaces ignored by his peers. The passage indicates that through functioning in what may almost be called 'realms of non-being,' the ideal man becomes near to Tao (the Way). A final qualification for the ideal man's

actions is non-competitiveness. While Confucius and Mencius share a similar distaste of profit, for Laozi this proscription in rooted is a creed of action that calls for not opposing others directly and instead allowing intangible methods of influence obtain desired results. The ideal man thus acts with people, not against them, and acts through indirect influence rather than direct force.

The answer to our second question is fairly similar and like our first answer, we must look to what is perhaps the most famous means of expressing the Way for a metaphor with strong implications for our analysis of wen and wu. Rather than water, the metaphor in question is femininity, the word yin or water has often been associated with feminine in the Chinese contexts. For example, "The Great One Gives Birth to the Waters", in Chinese, "太一生水") or to be more precise, the feminine characterization of the Way in the Dao-De Jing. Two good examples of this use of the feminine are found in chapters 49 (186) and 52 (192):

> *The sage, in the government of his empire, has no subjective viewpoint.*
> *His mind forms a harmonious whole with that of his people.*
> *They all lend their eyes and ears, and he treats them all as infants.*
> *He who has found the mother (Tao)*
> *And thereby understands her sons*
> *And having understood the sons,*
> *Still keeps to the mother.* [9]

The ultimate goal for the Daoist sage is sublimating his essence with the universal force of the Way. These passages capture that sentiment exactly, reflecting a point of success when the sage has grasped the objective viewpoint of the Way. His relationship with the people is twofold. On the one hand the sage's deep immersion in the Way grants him the ability to all, but share the thoughts of the people ("his mind forms a harmonious whole with that of the people"). Yet, while he remains rooted within society - a fundamental condition for Laozi's politically conscious sage – his enhanced Way-consciousness distinguishes from other people; the sage is like a mature adult while in terms of the Way, others are only infants. The responsibility incumbent on the sage as a result of these two realities is implicitly motherly, a feminine consciousness to sustain and support the people that reflect the nurturing aspect of a mother. Like a mother with child, the sage must recognize the holistic relationship he has with his charges. Every action he may do will influence the people and, hence, like a mother, the sage is advised to act through non-action, nurturing his charges with modesty grounded in pursuit of further progress along the Way.

Conclusion

The history of China's scholar-officials, also known as literati, scholar-gentlemen, were politicians and government officials appointed by the emperor of China to perform day-

[9] See K. Jasper's commentary on this passage (Jaspers, 1974, 97), which he stresses teaches "self-knowledge, a desire to posses oneself by knowledge of oneself, is the knowledge of being rooted in Tao."

to-day political duties. It is intriguing to imagine the historical landscape of China's scholar-officials that differ with Daoism never to have emerged as a distinct school of thought. With only Confucius and Mencius supplying models of an ideal masculinity grounded in the wen with paternal wu like implications, could scholar-officials have dealt with challenges to their identity as they did?

Based on the analysis of the ideal man in Confucius, Mencius and Laozi, it is apparent that scholar-officials were asked to be many things at the same time: a heroic paradigm of moral virtue, a courageous force of verbal influence and a retiring figure; nonetheless effective at leading the people. More explicitly, Rosemont (2001) contrasts a junzi, an ideal gentleman, with scholar-official, who is at the initial state of ethical development, tends to be precise, formal and perhaps even punctilious, whereas the former's conduct is not forced, but rather effortless, spontaneous and creative. Perhaps the final message of these three sages of ancient China lies in their shared recognition that the responsibility of leadership is irredeemably difficult, a weighty load that must be born with modesty and grace. As Laozi writes (78, trans. Chan 1963, 236) in closing "He who suffers disgrace for his country, is called the lord of the land. He who takes upon himself the country's misfortunes becomes the master of the empire."

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