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A Rainy Sunday Discovery that Changed My Life

It was a rainy day and I was an idle and disinterested 14 year-old, searching for some meaning in my mother’s vast library. The room was small and cramped with bookshelves in every corner, with books literally pouring forth from them, wedged into every possible space, hiding underneath the shelves, as well as precariously teetering on top of them. A particular volume with a bright yellow jacket seemed to stick out from the rest of the jumble. My hand gravitated towards it and I slowly removed it from the shelf and sat down on the floor, amidst all of those other books. As I began to read the introduction, written by Carl Jung, I discovered words and concepts that I had never known before, words like synchronicity, and concepts like yin and yang. I often perused mom’s bookshelf and usually after a cursory glance returned the book to the shelf. On this occasion I was enthralled by my find and, deciding that this was a book worth exploring in depth, I took it to my room and proceeded to read further.

The glowing yellow book I discovered was none other than the Yi Jing. Over the course of the next few months, as I delved more deeply into this treasure and began to use it for divination, an entire new world opened up before me. My discovery and subsequent use of the Yi Jing marked the beginning of my personal spiritual journey (at least on a conscious level). Working with it gave me the beginnings of an awareness of a non-local spiritual force with which I could connect through the divination process. For me,
a young teenage girl with lots of questions, doubts, and drama, this was a very significant find. The Yijing had become a voice that could help me feel at ease with myself and my situation, no matter how difficult or twisted it seemed to be.

The Yijing is one of the most ancient books known to man. It contains wisdom that has been used and expounded upon by magicians, shamans, scholars, and scientists alike for over 2 millenia. The Yijing is not simply an oracle, although that may have been its original and most primal purpose. Contained within the Yijing and its satellite theories there are complex systems of cosmology, astrology and numerology/mathematics. There are even some modern researchers who identify the Yijing as the primary inspiration for the binary code and others who find within its complexities a pattern identical to the genetic code, the source of all life itself.

As much as I appreciated and loved the Yijing as a teenager, its initial value for me was limited to its use as a tool for divination. In this way, the Yijing's presence in my life waxed and waned throughout the last 12 years. It was only recently, when I began my life's work by studying Chinese Medicine that the Yijing made its new appearance in my life and began to reveal its deeper layers to me. Surprisingly, it made this appearance as an answer to the all important question: “how can I become the best physician possible?” That was when I began to gain a whole new appreciation for the Yijing as a tool for medical practice. This work illustrates how the Yijing is a valuable tool for the physician, and demonstrates specifically how it can be applied in a medical context.

Introducing the Yijing

The book that is known today as the Yijing is actually a compendium of works by four different legendary authors whose dates span over 2500 years. The first was the legendary Fu Xi, (~2800 BCE) who mystically received and recorded the eight trigrams known as the ba gua (八卦). Approximately 1500 years later, King Wen (~1100 BCE) combined these trigrams, arranging them into the 64 hexagrams, (liu shi-si gua 六十四卦) and wrote a commentary on them which we call the “explanation of hexagrams” or gua ci (卦辭). King Wen's son, the Duke of Zhou then wrote an explanation of each line of each hexagram, which is the Yao Ci (爻辭). The final contribution to the Yijing, known as the Ten Wings, legend attributes to the great sage Confucius (~551 BCE). It is in this most recent addition to the Yijing (which is still ~2500 years old!) that we first encounter the junzi.

The junzi takes on a principle role in the Third and Fourth Wings, which together are called Xiang Zhuan, Commentary on the Images. This paper is in part a translation of the Da Xiang, or Great Images, which make up the bulk of the Xiang Zhuan. The translation, and its subsequent commentary, will reveal how the junzi teaches us to become great physicians by being a model. The Da Xiang refers to the images associated with the two trigrams in each hexagram. The image text for each hexagram deduces the meaning of the hexagram as a whole, (as a function of the interaction of two trigrams) and from this contemplation in turn draws conclusions applicable to the life of man. The one who deduces the meaning of the hexagrams based on the alchemy of the two trigrams and takes action accordingly is the junzi.

Introducing the Junzi (君子)

The junzi, as the exemplary person, is one who through disciplined practice sets in motion a sympathetic vibration for others to follow. 1

-David Jones

1 http://www.asianst.org/EAA/jones.htm
All men who earnestly seek to follow the 'way'
are chun-tzu... 2
-Howard Smith

The junzi (君子) of the Yijing is a person who recognizes himself as an instrument of heaven whose main purpose is to help others. The term junzi did not always have this meaning; originally it meant “ruler’s son” and was an indication of socio-political status. Before the compound junzi existed, there was jun (君). According to the great sinologist Leon Wieger, the earliest primitive form of jun (from the Shang dynasty ~1700 BCE) depicts “a cap with horns, to inspire awe.” 3 This primitive meaning suggests that the jun was a powerful shaman, a person with a commanding and intimidating presence. At the very root of jun is the shaman, the very ancient doctor archetype. By the end of the Zhou dynasty, the appearance of the character had changed considerably, along with its meaning: “a HAND which acts, a mouth which MAKES LAW.” 4

Another common etymological interpretation of jun is that it is “a man who speaks 口 with a hand 又 and a rod 丨, a monarch”. 5 Although the specific meaning of jun has shifted over time, beginning as ‘shaman’ and evolving to ‘monarch’, the more general meaning of ‘a person that commands respect and inspires awe’ has endured through the ages. This ability to command respect and inspire awe is essential for a ruler, but it is also an important skill for a great physician to possess. When the term junzi first appeared, it was strictly used in a political sense, meaning “ruler’s (jun 君) son (zi 子). According to Hall and Ames, the pre-Confucian junzi “ was a term that specifically denoted nobility of birth and rank, and had no application as a category of personal achievement.” 6 Eventually the term junzi was appropriated by Confucius to denote a morally upright person.

To Confucius, a junzi was not the son of a lord, but someone who follows the course appropriate to such a position. A gentleman was someone who had set his mind/heart along the way, who cultivated his de (德), or potency, in accordance with the rites(li 禮). 7

This Confucian junzi is the junzi that we find in the Yijing. He will be discussed further in a later section. (For a deeper appreciation jun and junzi and their use in different classical literary contexts please refer to Appendix I.) Now that we are more familiar with the junzi, we can appreciate the ways that following his example will enable us to become great physicians. There are three main qualities of the Yijing’s junzi which, if diligently studied and cultivated, will enable a physician to become great. (The qualities are described here in terms of actions and behaviors.) The junzi...1: Takes in a given situation, extracts essential information, and acts on that information with confidence, 2: is of value to the community while maintaining personal power and 3; provides a proven means to cultivate self-trust (devotion) and focus (knowledge) to the highest level possible. These three qualities are congruent with the attributes of a physician of superior skill and can be cultivated by studying the actions of the Yijing’s junzi and imitating them.

The first quality can be understood in terms of medical diagnosis and treatment. In the Yijing, the junzi translates the symbolic natural images of the hexagrams into practical actions and codes of conduct. As a physician, one would ideally perform a similar function in relation to a patient. Through accurate diagnosis, a great physician makes sense out of the symptoms of the patient, which are often symbolic in nature. Then he must separate the essential information from that which is non-essential. Finally, he acts based on this interpretation of symptoms, decisively and with confidence. The process outlined above is essential to master in order to achieve success in medicine. As we will see later on, the junzi is a true master of this process and understanding his methods will enable us to refine our skills in diagnosis as well as treatment.

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2 Howard Smith, Confucius, p. 65
3 Ibid, p. 9
4 http://www.chineseetymology.org
5 David T. Hall and Roger T. Ames, Thinking Through Confucius, p. 183
6 Sarah Allan, The Way of Water and Sprouts of Virtue, p. 129
7 Liangsheng and Qi Wu, Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine, p. 17
The second quality of the junzi that is useful for the physician is that he has a strong sense of the community and his specific role within it. Because of his importance within a community, a medical practitioner is faced with the challenge of balancing some seemingly contradictory moral choices: serving others while making a living for himself, and being intimate with strangers while maintaining good boundaries and a sense of professionalism. The junzi of the Yijing’s Image text provides a model for how to maintain healthy relationships with people (and serve them) while preserving one’s own health, well being, and integrity.

The third and perhaps most essential thing that the junzi has to teach us as medical practitioners is the importance of spiritual cultivation along with a means to practice it. Through the cultivation of attunement and ritual, the junzi is able to be in touch with an underlying invisible, but nonetheless pervasive, reality and be 100% present in any situation, no matter what it might be. This is an invaluable skill for anyone involved in medicine. There are many layers to what we perceive as real. Through spiritual cultivation, it is possible to develop the ability to see past the crude and obvious layer of material reality into the more refined levels of the spiritual reality. When a doctor can see into the subtler, energetic realms, then he will be able to see a pattern of disease before it manifests on the material level, and will able to intervene before the patient becomes seriously ill. This is one of the most fundamental skills of a superior physician, and is essential for successful treatment, as stated in the Huang di Nei Jing, chapter 2:

When a sage treats a patient, precaution is always emphasized, and he often uses preventative measures in calming down the disturbances. If the disease is treated after it has already been formed, or (if one tries) to calm down the disturbance after it has already taken shape, it will be too late, just like (waiting) to dig a well until one is thirsty, or to cast weapons after war has already broken out.8

In order to truly practice prevention, a physician must be able to see the energetic pattern of disease before it manifests as a material reality. He will only develop this skill through the practice of spiritual cultivation. A practice of cultivation will not only allow a physician to see patterns before they develop into full blown diseases, it will also add potency to the healing process that will facilitate the transformation from states of disease to health. One of the defining characteristics of the junzi is that he is perpetually involved in self-cultivation. The following section will highlight this and several other hallmark attributes that will give us a deeper understanding of the junzi and of the three qualities that have just been discussed.

Confucius’ Junzi

*The Confucian gentleman moves with an effortless grace within the framework of fixed convention, informing every action with consideration and respect for the other person.*9

-A.C. Graham

*There is no doubt...that the ideal moral character for Confucius is the chun tzu (junzi)....*10

-D.C. Lau

In the works of Confucius, we find the junzi as a paragon of social, political, and moral excellence; an ideal to which every person who wishes to cultivate should aspire. While the term originally referred to a person of high social standing, (literally, the ruler’s son), Confucius deepened and broadened its meaning, to include a person who has, through diligent self-cultivation, achieved a high level of mastery not only of himself, but of the circumstances surrounding him. A complete understanding of the Confucian junzi cannot be reached without a brief overview of the basic virtues that he must by definition possess: ren, li, xin, zhi, and yi.

8 A.C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, p.10
10 Howard Smith, *Confucius*, p. 67
Ren, often translated as benevolence, is the most essential component of a junzi’s moral persona. The character for ren (仁) is made up of the radical for person (亻) combined with the number two (二). On a most basic level, the character denotes human interrelatedness, the conduct of one person towards another. Compassion and love for one’s fellow man is one of the hallmark characteristics of any fine physician. This quality must define a doctor’s interactions with his patients and his larger community. Within the context of Confucian philosophy, ren is the quality of absolute selflessness, always putting the interests of others above one’s own goals of personal gain. Howard Smith explains ren as a love for others, with two characteristic components, loyalty and consideration:

This love for others is made evident by the virtues of loyalty and consideration, for loyalty consists in the entire devotion of oneself to the best interests of another, and consideration consists in never doing to others what one would not wish done to oneself. 11

What Smith refers to here are two qualities that are subcategories of ren: zhong (忠), which translates as sincerity, and shu, (恕) which (roughly) translates as forbearance or tolerance. What is meant by zhong is what Smith calls loyalty: it is focusing the will towards the task of benefiting others. Shu, on the other hand, is the awareness of another’s desires and dislikes, ie, what do other people want done to them; what do they not want done? The concept of shu is a Chinese version of the Christian golden rule “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you” in its negative form: “do not do things to others that you would not like done to yourself.” 12 Through the practices of zhong and shu, ren is achieved. Another aspect of ren is that it requires the person who wishes to embody it to overcome his own self-interests. For Confucius, this process of overcoming personal desires is made possible by “observing the rites”, which is what is meant by the virtue of li. 13

Li (禮) can be translated as “propriety”, or “politeness”. Propriety may be the best translation, however the English word itself is seldom used and may need defining for a reader who is unfamiliar with it. Here are two relevant definitions from the Oxford English Dictionary:

Propriety: n.
6. Appropriateness to circumstances or conditions; suitability, aptness, fitness; conformity with what is required by a rule, principle, etc.; rightness, correctness, accuracy.
7. a. Conformity to accepted standards of behaviour or morals, esp. with regard to good manners or polite usage; seemliness, decorousness, decency; (observance of) convention. 14

In terms of a translation for li, these two definitions for propriety come pretty close to describing the different nuances that are present in this ancient term. But there is an aspect that is missing from the English word “propriety” and its definitions: this is the crucial aspect of li as sacred ritual or sacrifice. The character li (禮) is a picture of an altar with a ritual vessel on the right; on the left there is illumination coming down from heaven. So not only is li a code of conduct, it is also a sacred ritual that connects a person with the macrocosm of the universe, through the microcosm of human society. A particularly rich understanding of li is put forth by Herbert Fingarette:

Confucius wanted to teach us...that sacred ceremony in its narrower, root meaning is not a totally mysterious appeasement of spirits external to human and earthly life. Spirit is no longer an external being

11 As in the Analects, 12.2 when Confucius says “ Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.” (D.C. Lau, Confucius, The Analects, p. 109)
12 See Analects, 12.1: “To return to the observance of the rites through overcoming the self constitutes benevolence.” (D.C. Lau, Confucius, The Analects, p. 109)
13 OED Online
14 Herbert Fingarette, Confucius, The Secular as Sacred, p. 17
influenced by the ceremony; it is that that is expressed and comes most alive in the ceremony. Instead of being a diversion of attention from the human realm to another transcendent realm, the overtly holy ceremony is to be seen as the central symbol, both expressive of and participating in the holy as a dimension of all truly human existence.  

The above statement highlights the central role of "li" in the life of a "junzi". Li brings spirit into daily activities. Any physician that sees a patient with this attitude of holy ceremony is bound to be a great doctor. In order to fully live in accordance with li, a person must be fully present spiritually: li is not a ritual that can be performed mechanically, it must be imbued with a person's sincere awareness.

Another key attribute of the junzi is "xin" (信仰), which can be loosely translated as "integrity", but more precisely means "making good on one's word". It is made up of the components ren, (亻), person, and yan, (言), words. Together they make "xin" which points to the notion that a person stands by their words; their actions are consistent with what they say. From this principle follows the idea that it is easier to preserve one's integrity by being silent: "Confucius' general advice is that one should be quick to act but slow to speak." There are two aspects of "xin" that define it as a crucial virtue for the junzi. Firstly, a person's ability to make friends and live harmoniously amongst others in a community inevitably hinges on that person's ability to live up to their word. Secondly, to be "xin" is to be true, not only to others but also to oneself. It is through this practice that one can stand upright and truly realize one's path in the world.

"Zhi", (知) wisdom or knowing, is the fourth fundamental building block of the junzi's personality to be discussed here. The character consists of 矢, (shi), an arrow, placed next to 口, (kou), mouth. The imagery of the arrow is directional and precise, while the mouth gives the idea of communication. They come together to express an intersection of knowledge, understanding, and sharing. The directional precision aspect of "zhi" is highlighted in Analects 14.28 which says: "A man of wisdom(zhi) is never of two minds." It is clear from this line that a person with zhi has a level of discernment that helps him act from a dimension beyond states of indecisiveness. Roger Ames and David Hall translate zhi as "realizing"; "to realize' in the sense of 'making real'". They make the argument that zhi should be interpreted as an action, or a state of being, rather than simply a descriptive characteristic. Zhi as 'realizing' conceptually refers to the practical application of discernment towards predicting or perhaps determining the outcome of future events. Whether it is interpreted as an action or as a descriptive word, zhi is what allows the junzi to discern what is appropriate or righteous in any given situation. This state of righteousness is the final virtue left to explore: it is called "yi".

One of the most illusive qualities that constitutes a junzi is that of "yi (義)". Yi has been translated into English in many ways: righteousness, right action, duty, appropriateness, fittingness and morality comprise a small sampling of translations for yi:. As one can see just by observing the disparity between these various translations, yi is not a virtue that can easily be grasped by the average English speaker. It is a conceptual space where a sense of appropriateness merges with one's agency, or one's "Self. To employ the virtue of yi is to make one's "Self" orderly. For Roger Ames and David Hall, yi denotes the ability of a person to integrate morality into their actions: "At its most fundamental level, yi denotes the importation of aesthetic, moral and rational significance into personal action in the world." 20 In this sense, yi is also variable, it is defined based on context. Bringing morality into one's actions will manifest differently depending on the situation

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15 See Analects, 8.2, and 17.11
16 D.C. Lau, Confucius, The Analects, xxv
17 D.C. Lau, Confucius, The Analects, p. 141
18 David T. Hall and Roger T. Ames, Thinking Through Confucius, p. 50
19 Ibid, p. 50
20 David T. Hall and Roger T. Ames, Thinking Through Confucius, p. 95
such as himself that he took the term chun-tzu (junzi) as a practical ideal towards which to strive.  

This explains why the junzi is the ideal moral character: to become a junzi is a goal that is relatively attainable. Not that becoming a junzi was considered to be an easy feat. Confucius himself denied having attained “junzi status” in the following passage of the Analects (Confucius’ most famous work), (7.33): “In unstinted effort I can compare with others, but in how to be a practising gentleman (junzi) I can, as yet, claim no insight.” 21 In other parts of the Analects, he praises some of his students with the title of junzi, so most probably the above line is a display of modesty. Nevertheless, it demonstrates the high regard that Confucius had for junzi as well as the process of becoming one, which can only be achieved through rigorous self-cultivation. Just as a common person must cultivate himself to become a junzi, so too must a common physician cultivate himself to become great. In the next section, we will discuss the cultivation of the junzi physician.

The Sheng Jen were the holy sages of ancient times who, having followed the ‘way’ to its goal, had attained divine status... Confucius considered this ideal to be so far above a struggling and imperfect mortal such as himself that he took the term chun-tzu (junzi) as a practical ideal towards which to strive.  

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