

THE OVERCOMING ONESELF (*KE JI*) IN *THE ANALECTS OF CONFUCIUS*: THE END OF PERSONALITY OR ITS FOUNDATION?

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The paper contains an analysis of the conception of personality concentrated in the ideal of exemplary person (jun zi) in classical Confucianism as it is shown in The Analects of Confucius. An attempt is made to discover what unique features, according to Confucius, are characteristic of such an exemplary person. So the meaning and significance of the two interrelated ethical categories of classical Confucianism, ren and li, is shown. In the second part of the paper, author tries to expose how, in accordance with The Analects, the ideal of jun zi may be reached. Thereto author analyzes the meaning of ke ji in The Analects and offers a new translation of the term, claiming that his approach contributes to a better understanding of the conception of personality in classical Confucianism.

Many questions concerning the nature of man, raised thousands of years ago, have not lost their urgency until today. What is the essence of the human being, what kinds of relations bind him with nature and with other human beings – all such inquiries rest upon the general conception of personality. Yet this subject is not simply a cliquy field of interests of a narrow circle of philosophers or at least students of philosophy. In the present-day's discourse we hear plenty of unceasing discussions on "authorship rights" in culture, "private property" in economics, "personal rights and liberties" in politics. All such considerations must unavoidably be based on some kind of a fundamental notion of the person, the personality, the self. It is quite reasonable to expect philosophy to make an effort to propose such a foundation.

For a long time conceptual problems of the personality have been considered as monopolistic subject matters of the philosophical, political, cultural or religious discourses of the Occident. Although in the last three or four decades the typical Eurocentric *à la Hegel* statements claiming that the ideology of despotism was inherent to the classical Chinese tradition of thought (especially to that of classical Confucianism) are receding into the background, the overstressed and clichéd Chinese "collectivism" is still broadly opposed against the not in the least stereotyped occidental "individualism". Nevertheless, as intercultural studies were constantly gathering pace and the intercontinental scholarly dialogue was permanently widening, the new approach to the significance of the oriental intellectual heritage concerning the status and meaning of the personality has begun to grow influential. In the face of problems arising out of the inside of Western liberal democracy

(such as dilemmas of civic rights and duties, liberty and equality, etc.) the Indian, Japanese or Chinese traditions emerged as a potential mine of new impulses and original ideas. The questions that not so long ago would be considered quite paradoxical and inconceivable have been raised. For example, how, let's say, the Confucian conception of the person and personality can be helpful to the modern democratic society in solving its intrinsic problems?¹ Is it possible for such comparative investigations to become a clue to clear important occidental questions concerning the sameness of the self in the stream of time?²

On the other hand, such intercultural studies pose some difficulties, and the problem of the adequate understanding of a different language is perhaps one of primary importance. A careless and loose translation of key conceptions may lead an interpreter of alien cultures astray. Each scholar is already strongly influenced by his own cultural milieu, by his own experience, by his inherited "way of thinking" as Hajime Nakamura calls it³. Thus, pessimists insist that those undeniable differences between cultures throw unconquerable obstacles in the way of understanding the other. Yet we uphold the view that there exists some kind of the common core of all humankind, which enables men to find keys to the communication and to the understanding of each other. Therefore in this article we raise two basic interdependent goals: firstly, to motivate our thesis that in the classical Confucian tradition of thinking the ideal of the unique, free and conscious personality embodied in the concept of *jun zi* 君子 was elaborated. An attempt will be made to expose what this Confucian ideal of the personality has in common with that one formed and developed in the Occident, and how the Confucian approach is unique and different. Secondly, we will argue that the strong demand to bring the ideal of the personality into effect, existing in classical Confucianism, is achievable through the so-called *ke ji* 克己 (the overcoming of one's limits, i. e. extending one's limits, empowering oneself) project. Accordingly, the very notion of *ke ji* we will suggest to translate and to conceive rather as "to overcome one's limits (one's personal boundaries)" than "to overcome one's self" or "to subdue oneself".

In this text, we are going to reach our goals through a critical reconstruction and analysis of the ideal of personality as it was recorded in *Lun Yu* 论语 – *The Analects of Confucius*. Such a concentration on particularly this one Confucian text while investigating the prevailing conception of the personality in classical Confucianism could help us to avoid many references to the ideas of the two most influential disciples of Confucius, Meng Zi 孟子 and

¹ See Hahm Chaibong, "Confucian Rituals and the Technology of the Self: a Foucaultian Interpretation", *Philosophy East and West* 51, 3 (2001): 315–324; Sor-hoon Tan, "From Cannibalism to Empowerment: an Analects-inspired Attempt to Balance Community and Liberty", *Philosophy East and West* 54, 1 (2004): 52–70; Joseph Chan, "Moral Autonomy, Civil Liberties, and Confucianism", *Philosophy East and West* 52, 3 (2002): 281–310.

² See Jess Fleming, „Self and (In)finity: Embodiment and the Other”, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 29, 2 (2002): 171–191.

³ See Hajime Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India–China–Tibet–Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1971.

Xun Zi 荀子, in some cases very different from each other. Although examination of the ideas of these thinkers would surely provide a more comprehensive understanding of the conception of personality in classical Confucianism in general, it would also necessitate work of a far bigger extent than we are able to accomplish in this paper. Therewith, it is universally accepted among sinologists that the text of *Lun Yu* was not written by Confucius himself but by his disciples and disciples of his disciples. Therefore, we think the ideas expressed in *Lun Yu* should be attributed to classical Confucianism as a way of thinking rather than specifically to Confucius as a real historical person.

***Jun zi* – the ideal ethical person**

In our opinion, one of the biggest misunderstandings in the history of studies of Chinese culture and the way of thinking is the widespread idea that the classical Chinese way of thinking and traditional Chinese culture in general have disregarded the individual, the personality and have only took care of interests of the society and of the state. To some extent this judgment is vital even today. It is often supposed that the interests of the state and society have ostensibly restricted and straitened the freedom of the individual herewith eliminating the personality as such, reducing it to the instrument intended for achieving social well-being. This attitude has followed from the common occidental tendency to think in terms of dichotomy, the implacable oppositions between the Orient and the Occident, the subject and the object, reflection and experience, individual and society, and so on. In our opinion, these affirmations have no objective base. We believe that a more careful inquiry into classical Chinese philosophical and historical texts will show us the opposite picture.

Nakamura in his book “Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples” cites Wing-tsit Chan who states: “While property was held in common, each son had his inalienable right to his inheritance. There was no individual vote guaranteed by a constitution, and yet in village meetings every male adult was a voting member by natural right. In the thirteen-century-long tradition of civil service examinations, the basis for the selection of government officials was individual merit rather than race, creed, economic status, sex, or age”⁴. Such a practical implementation without any doubt had to be legitimated by some kind of theoretical basis. And such a basis was provided exactly by classical Confucianism, first of all by *The Analects* of Confucius. A great part of contemporary sinologists around the world do agree to the fact of existence of the theoretical ideal of the personhood in classical Confucianism and of the practical request of the fulfilment of such an ideal in Chinese culture at large. Heiner Roetz, for instance, states that “the protagonist of the Confucian ethics is positively a “person” in the

⁴ Cited in accordance to Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking*, 247.

sense of a self-responsible autonomous being with his own dignity. This autonomous being will do his best to fulfil his social role, but he is more than that”⁵.

Contemporary Chinese scholar Chen Jingpan maintained that “the aim of teaching of Confucius was, to state it very briefly, to bring about social reforms through educating individuals of society; to put forth an ideal social order through cultivating ideal ways of life and full development of the personality of the individual. He believed in the importance of the individual to ensure the progress or reform of society”⁶. The ideal of such an educated and responsible personality in classical Confucianism was very clearly concentrated on the image of the exemplary person, *jun zi*.

Primarily this term was used to indicate a son of the ruler, a nobleman, “member of the upper class”. For the ancient Chinese it was obvious that such a man had to be bound by a “particular code of morals and manners”⁷. So the word *jun zi* also implies superiority of character and behavior. Yet in *The Analects* and later Confucian texts this requisite of birth is waived⁸. To Confucius, as Chen Jingpan notes, the term *jun zi* “signified only those who had virtues, no matter whether they had any official power rank or not”⁹. So now our question is: what are the qualities a person should exhibit to earn him the name of the exemplary person, *jun zi*?

What qualities are characteristic of the exemplary person?

Sinologists do agree that the ethical ideal of *jun zi* (the exemplary person) in classical Confucianism cannot be reflected separately from the two fundamental ethical conceptions – *ren* 仁 (most often translated into English as “humaneness”, “humanity”, “true-manhood”, “virtuous”, “love”, “benevolence”, etc.) and *li* 礼 (most often translated as “regulations”, “ceremonies”, “propriety”, “rites”, etc.). The former assumed an exclusive significance in classical Confucianism because it was not so widespread in the Chinese thinking tradition before Confucius as the latter. The introduction of the *ren* concept into the moral discourse of the Chinese thinking tradition is ascribed namely to Master Kong, as Confucius was also called.

Just like the majority of traditional Chinese thinking categories, *ren* as well as *li* are notions not only complicated to translate into Western languages, but also difficult to define them in set terms. American scholars David Hall and Roger Ames note that most Confucius’ interpreters and researchers have failed to avoid one-sided approach to the *ren*. In some cases

⁵ Heiner Roetz, *Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age: A Reconstruction under the Aspect of the Break-through toward Post-conventional Thinking*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993, 150.

⁶ Jingpan Chen, *Confucius as a Teacher: Philosophy of Confucius with Special Reference to Its Educational Implications*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1994, 175.

⁷ See *The Analects*, ed. Yang Muzhi, translated into English by Arthur Waley, translated into Modern Chinese by Yang Bojun, Hunan People’s Publishing House: Foreign Languages Press, 1999, 306. Also see Chen, *Confucius*, 179.

⁸ *The Analects*, 306.

⁹ Chen, *Confucius*, 179.

the “inwardness” of *ren* was overstated and the conception was introduced exclusively as an inner attitude or even as a certain state of mind of the human being. In this way a risk of psychologism is involved. By way of illustration, Tu Weiming’s explanation of *ren* as “a matter of inner strength and self-knowledge” is presented: *ren* “is rather a principle of inwardness. By “inwardness”, it is meant that *ren* is not a quality acquired from outside; it is not a product of biological, social or political forces. ... Hence, *ren* as an inner morality is not caused by the *li* from outside”¹⁰. In some other cases the “outwardness” of the conception is overstressed, just like in the interpretation of Herbert Fingarette where “*ren* is the aspect of conduct that directs our attentions to the particular person and his orientation as the actor”¹¹. Yet we consider this interpretation as a reduction of *ren* to *li*, to the “rites” or “the ritual propriety” (we are going to enlarge upon that term later), because the difference between those two conceptions becomes rather obscure.

Hall and Ames argue that such a claim made by Fingarette saying that “*li* and *ren* are two aspects of the same thing” is “an impoverishment of this concept”¹². They suggest that it is important to notice that *ren* in Confucian texts is used not only as a noun and an adjective, but also as a transitive verb. Thus, “*ren* should be regarded as a qualitative transformation of person, which embraces not only the achieved person, but also the process whereby this quality of humanity is realized”¹³. Considering the fact that everyone’s life is full of unexpected situations, it is understandable that “what might be *ren* under one set of circumstances is not necessarily *ren* under another. And for each unique person the way of achieving humanity is necessarily going to be different”¹⁴.

This interpretation of Hall and Ames is also supported by the attitude of Confucius himself. He offers many miscellaneous answers how *ren* shows in the true-life practice rather than strives to theorize it. Living and acting in accordance to *ren* would be a focal attention of Confucius’ teaching, but not a strict conceptualisation of the term, despite that already his disciples desiderated it¹⁵. Such a viewpoint helps us to clarify one of the most controversial passages of *Lun Yu*, where, albeit the fact that the term *ren* in the relatively brief text of *The Analects* is mentioned 108 times, it is stated: “The Master only rarely spoke about personal advantage (*li* 利), the propensity of circumstances (*ming* 命), or authoritative conduct (*ren*

¹⁰ Cited in accordance to David L. Hall, Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987, 112.

¹¹ Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius – the Secular as Sacred*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972, 47.

¹² Hall, Ames, *Thinking*, 113.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁵ See Kim-Chong Chong, “The Practice of *Ren*”, *Philosophy East and West* 49, 3 (1999): 298–316; Hsei-Yung Hsu, “Confucius and Act-centered Morality”, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 27, 3 (2000): 331–344; Roger T. Ames, Henry Rosemont Jr., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, New York: Ballantine Books, 49; Hall, Ames, *Thinking*, 114–125; and many others.

仁) ” (9.1)¹⁶. Here are only a few cases of true-life manifestations of *ren* as stated by Confucius: “Fan Chi inquired about authoritative conduct (*ren* 仁), and the Master said, “Love others” (12.22). “Zhonggong inquired about authoritative conduct (*ren* 仁). The Master replied, “In your public life, behave as though you are receiving important visitors; employ the common people as though you are overseeing a great sacrifice” (12.2). “Fan Chi inquired about authoritative conduct (*ren* 仁), and the Master replied, “At home be deferential, in handling public affairs be respectful, and do your utmost (*zhong* 忠) in your relationships with others” (13.19). “Zizhang asked Confucius about authoritative conduct (*ren* 仁). Confucius replied, “A person who is able to carry into practice five attitudes in the world can be considered authoritative.” “What are these five attitudes?” asked Zizhang. Confucius replied, “Deference, tolerance, making good on one’s word (*xin* 信), diligence, and generosity” (17.6). “... As for filial and fraternal responsibility, it is, I suspect, the root of authoritative conduct (*ren* 仁)” (1.2).

Even though Confucius does not produce a notional and abstract definition of the term *ren*, he underlines in *The Analects* clearly and strongly that an ideal ethical person, *jun zi*, in no way can be imaginable without *ren*: “Wherein do the exemplary persons (*jun zi* 君子) who would abandon their authoritative conduct (*ren* 仁) warrant that name? Exemplary persons do not take leave of their authoritative conduct even for the space of a meal. When they are troubled, they certainly turn to it, as they do in facing difficulties” (4.5). In turn *ren* cannot be achievable without mastering *li*, and *vice versa*. “The Master said: “What has a person who is not authoritative (*ren* 仁) got to do with observing ritual propriety (*li* 礼)?” (3.3). *Li* is as important an attribute of the exemplary person as *ren*. The meaning and significance of *li* and *ren* to the conception of the personality as it was developed in classical Confucianism cannot be fully realized without reasoning both notions at once. One of the key passages of *Lun Yu*, which we are going to discuss more closely later in this article, illustrates our statement: “Yan Hui inquired about authoritative conduct (*ren* 仁). The Master replied, “Through self-discipline and observing ritual propriety (*li* 礼) one becomes authoritative in one’s conduct (*ke ji fu li wei ren* 克己复礼为仁)” (12.1).

It was no need for Confucius to introduce the notion of *li* to the ethical discourse of his time. It was used rather often in old classical texts of Chinese literary tradition and was understood mainly as rituals, as commonly accepted conventional norms of all kinds of activities, generally as those of religious practices. However, Confucius’ teaching strongly adjusted the term *li* providing it with a stronger ethical background and turning it to an ethical notion. As Heiner Roetz notices, by implanting his own conception of *li* Confucius tried to show that “the conventional ethical life must be based on the new foundation of an inner

¹⁶ Whenever citing *The Analects* the first number in the brackets refers to the number of the paragraph and the second to the number of the passage. Unless stated otherwise, the quotations from *The Analects* are cited in accordance with Roger T. Ames, Henry Rosemont Jr., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, New York: Ballantine Books.

morality”, i.e. that *li* as a form has to be supplemented by *ren* as a substance¹⁷. One of the functions of *li* is to fulfil the regulative role, to provide a moral action with a universally recognizable and acceptable form. In this aspect *li* is comparable with the function of a grammar in a language. As Hahm Chaibong states, “for Confucians, as with Wittgenstein, a “private language” is not possible. Just as the meaning of one’s word is determined by the grammar of the language that I share with others, so is the meaning of my action and behavior determined by a grammar of actions and behaviors”¹⁸. Failing such a frame of context which enables mutual understanding, failing a common and consolidating code of language or conduct, even the best things may turn into its contrary: “The Master said: “Deference unmediated by observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮) is lethargy; caution unmediated by observing ritual propriety is timidity; boldness unmediated by observing ritual propriety is rowdiness; candour unmediated by observing ritual propriety is rudeness” (8.2).

At the same time it is important to point out that the regulative function of *li* does not imply the constraining function. That is the realm of the law (*fa* 法). Lithuanian sinologist Loreta Poškaitė maintains: “In regard to the law (*fa*) the ritual propriety (*li*) becomes not an external artificial but an internal natural, not a regulating but a stimulating, not a depersonalizing but an impersonating measure. It is not the principle that uniforms (like the law) but rather that adjusts to each individuality and each situation, and therefore demands personal participation in it”¹⁹. The difference between the legislation and the ritual propriety *li* is also highlighted in *Lun Yu*: “The Master said: “Lead the people with administrative injunctions (*zheng* 政) and keep them orderly with penal law (*xing* 刑), and they will avoid punishments but will be without a sense of shame. Lead them with excellence (*de* 德) and keep them orderly through observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮), and they will develop a sense of shame, and moreover, will order themselves” (2.3).

On the other hand, only person’s willingness and frame of mind, his “authoritative conduct” will fill the empty form of behavior with a concrete and meaningful content. Let us quote a long but in this case very illustrative passage from *The Analects*: “Zaiwo inquired, “The three-year mourning period on the death of one’s parents is already too long. If for three years an exemplary person (*jun zi* 君子) were to give up observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮), the rites would certainly go to ruin. <...> Surely a year is good enough”. The Master replied, “Would you then be comfortable eating fine rice and wearing colorful brocade?” “I would indeed”, responded Zaiwo. “If you are comfortable, then do it”, said the Master. “When exemplary persons (*jun zi* 君子) are in the mourning shed, it is because they can find no relish in fine-tasting food, no pleasure in the sound of music, and no comfort in their usual lodgings, that they do not abbreviate the mourning period to one year. Now if you are comfortable with

¹⁷ Roetz, *Confucian Ethics*, 122.

¹⁸ Chaibong, “Confucian Rituals”, 317.

¹⁹ Loreta Poškaitė, „Kinų mąstymo situatyvumas Vakarų postmodernistinės kultūros orientalizacijoje“, in *Kultūrologija 7. Rytai–Vakarai: komparatyvistinės studijos II*, Vilnius: Kultūros ir meno institutas, 2001, 232.

these things, then by all means, enjoy them". When Zaiwo had left, the Master remarked, "Zaiwo is really perverse (*bu ren* 不仁)²⁰!" (17.21).

What interrelates Confucian and occidental conceptions of personality?

Sometimes in the intercultural studies the essence of the question, consciously or not, is transferred to terminological disputes which, in our opinion, rarely grant positive results, because words denoting reality but not reality itself become the key point of inquiry. In large part, it is terminological presuppositions that, we think, determine most statements that there is no philosophy in the history of Chinese culture. As an argument for such affirmations it is often said that φιλοσοφία is a Greek conception with no equivalent in China for thousands of years, and now its translation, *zhe xue* 哲学, used in modern Chinese is just an import of the Japanese *tetsugaku*²¹. A similar danger to slip into fruitless terminological disputes also lies dormant in discussions concerning the status of individuality in the Orient. Therefore, we support the view that to achieve an adequate understanding of a culture one has to seek to translate ideas rather than term words denoting them. Therefore we are going to explore what, speaking in general terms, hides under the notions "person" and "personality" in the occidental thinking tradition and whether there are any features that would be common to the conception of personality developed in the Occident and that of *jun zi* as recorded in *The Analects of Confucius*.

It is extremely difficult to speak about some general and united principles that would serve as a foundation of the conception of personality throughout all 2500-year-long history of Western philosophy with all its plurality of different and sometimes even warring schools, philosophers and ideas. Yet we have to sacrifice fidelity and to make some generalizations in order to be able to make a comparison.

One of the most significant aspects of the Western conception of personality is that in the Occident the individual was defined and realized through such oppositional distinctions as "individual *versus* society", "particular and unique *versus* common and universal", "private *versus* public" and so on. The more specific attributes ascribable to the individual, in our opinion, are self-consciousness and free will. The individual must be self-conscious, i.e. self-aware, self-knowledgeable and self-reflective, and also he must have free will, be self-determined, i. e. autonomous, able to make decisions on his own. By "autonomous" we do not mean absolutely autonomous, neither do we want to refer to absolute freedom, to self-sufficiency or to monadic insularity. What we understand under "autonomous" and "free will"

²⁰ *Bu ren* 不仁 literally translated means "not *ren* 仁".

²¹ Discussion on the status of philosophy in China: see Xiao-ming Wu, "Philosophy, *Philosophia*, and *Zhe-xue*", *Philosophy East and West* 48, 3 (1998): 406–452; Carine Defoort, "Is There Such a Thing as Chinese Philosophy? Arguments of an Implicit Debate", *Philosophy East and West* 51, 3 (2001): 393–413.

is that all intentions and actions held or made by the individual are considered as exclusively his/her own and nobody else's.

Many various philosophers, such as Descartes, Locke, Hobbes, Mill, Kant and others, who either purposely or not have grounded and advocated the dichotomous kind of thought, have influenced the fact that in the Occident there has been radicalized and fixed the conception of the individual as the qualitative opposite to the society. The society itself mainly was understood as a more or less artificial confederation of particular individuals rather than as a natural and organic environment of the human being. According to Tu Weiming, the transition from community to the society, from family or clan to the state, from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* is crucial to the Western thought²². In this paper, it is for us out of concern whether the state was understood positively as the condition of the progress or merely negatively as an institution of power and compulsion. At this point, it is only important that the so-called contraposition between the individual and the state was chosen as the datum-level for the defining and evaluation of the individual. Hence, the person was understood as a monadic and self-contained substance to which interpersonal relations were a kind of essentially external attribute, practically inevitable, though theoretically dispensable.

After all that was said above, let us mark out, despite all shades of the meaning, three features as, in our point of view, the most typical of and the most essential to the conception of the individual in the occidental tradition: 1) uniqueness, in the sense that the particular person essentially can not be replaced in his/her actions and being by anyone else (the best representation of this idea was made by Kant, when he states that a human being is the end-in-himself and can not be reduced to an implement); 2) free will, in the sense that all intentions and actions held or made by the individual are an autonomous and independent activity; and 3) self-consciousness, in the sense that the person recognizes himself as unique, volitional and indiscrete human being, realizes his own actions as *his* own actions, forecasts possible consequences and therefore takes the responsibility on himself.

At this point, it is important to state that the Chinese way of thinking does not hold the above-mentioned dichotomy. The Chinese perceive the reality and its dissimilar springs through the idea of polarity, the oneness of contraries, which was clearly expressed in the well known *Book of Changes – Yi Jing* 易经. Yet these different world-view presuppositions do not imply the impossibility of at some level shared values and ideas concerning the conception of personality both in the Occident and the Orient.

Thus, not so well conceptually polished as in theories of Western thinkers, all the three above-mentioned features required in the occidental conception of personality, in our opinion, are also characteristic of the *jun zi* – the exemplary person of classical Confucianism. The Confucian personality is self-conscious, recognizes himself as an individual and particular

²² Weiming Tu, "Implications of the Rise of "Confucian" East Asia", *Dédalus. Multiple Modernities* 129 (1) (2000): 199.

ego, which, instead of demanding liberties or rights from adverse surroundings, inclines to assume concrete obligations and herewith takes responsibility for his own actions too. In the *Lun Yu* we read: “The Master said: “Exemplary persons (*jun zi* 君子) make demands on themselves, while petty persons make demand on others” (15.21). The self-consciousness of *jun zi* is also demonstrated in *The Analects* of Confucius in the permanently stressed requirement to reflect on one’s own word and action, in other words, to examine oneself (*xing shen* 省身): “Master Zeng said: “Daily I examine my person on three counts. In my undertakings on behalf of other people, have I failed to do my utmost (*zhong* 忠)? In my interactions with colleagues and friends, have I failed to make good on my word (*xin* 信)? In what has been passed on to me, have I failed to carry it into practice?” (1.4).

Also, free will, which is the freedom to make one’s own decisions and to act morally according to one’s own will, in our opinion, is typical of the Confucian personality. Joseph Chan calls this element of personality “voluntary endorsement” and also argues that classical Confucians do accept such an idea²³. Russian sinologist Vitaly Rubin states that “the freedom of choice is one of the elements of the exemplary person (*jun zi*)”²⁴ and Chen Jingpan adds: “when Confucius laid stress upon what the foundation of *li* (or Ritual Action) was, the sincerity of individual nature or feeling, he was emphasizing the independence and freedom of the individual”²⁵. The autonomy of the Confucian personality, its free will and freedom of making its own decisions are well represented in the paragraph 18 of the *Lun Yu*, which is dedicated to the problem of “moral heroes who defy what they regard as immoral political authority”²⁶. V. Rubin even expresses the idea that the goal of the aforementioned paragraph in Confucius’ teaching was just to “discover a historical precedent that could legitimate the autonomy of actions of the exemplary person”²⁷. Such precedent was discovered in the case of brothers Bo Yi and Shu Qi, who, according to legends, voluntarily chose to starve to death, because they decided to refuse obeying the unjust ruler and rejected food which was nurtured in his land.

It is worth noting that this “unjust ruler” was, according to *Historical Records* of Sima Qian, Wu Wang, the great duke of the Zhou dynasty. There is no doubt as to Confucius’ respect to the rulers of Zhou, in some passages he even identifies himself with the said dynasty: “...such a wealth of culture! I follow the Zhou” (3.14). Thus, although brothers Bo Yi and Shu Qi challenged the rulers praised by Confucius, the Master characterized them with a great respect (see 18.8). Confucius valued the courage of brothers, their strength to act according to conscience and to struggle for their convictions: “Zigong ... asked: “What kind of persons were Bo Yi and Shu Qi?” The Master replied, “They were persons of character (*xian*

²³ See Chan, “Moral Autonomy”, 286–287.

²⁴ В. А. Рубин, *Личность и власть в древнем Китае*, Москва: Восточная литература, 1999, 95.

²⁵ Chen, *Confucius*, 274.

²⁶ Chan, “Moral Autonomy”, 290.

²⁷ Рубин, *Личность и власть*, 97.

贤) from bygone days”. “Did they harbor any ill will?” “Seeking to be authoritative in their conduct (*ren* 仁) they achieved their ends – why should they harbor ill will?” (7.15).

As we see, man’s free will was not denied in the teaching of Confucius, and those men who recognized themselves having such a will, who managed to withstand unjust volitions of the mighty of this world and to maintain the autonomy of their actions were called “moral persons”. One more drastic choice of free will is represented in the passage 15.9 of *The Analects*: “The Master said, “For a resolute scholar (*shi*) and authoritative person (*ren ren*), while they would not compromise their authoritative conduct to save their lives, they might well give up their lives in order to achieve it” (15.9). Thus, speaking in the words of Heiner Roetz, “man, then, can in principle choose his way freely, because he is even capable of suspending his very interests in self-preservation. Every Confucian has stressed this possibility of the basic moral decision, the elementary yes or not with all consequences”²⁸.

So now we ask: does the Confucian personality possess this third feature which we regard as one of the most essential to the conception of individual, i. e. uniqueness, in the sense that a particular person essentially cannot be replaced in his/her actions and existence by anyone else? And to this question we give the positive answer. In *Lun Yu* we read: “The Master said, “A gentleman is not an implement (*jun zi bu qi* 君子不器)” (2.12; tr. by A. Waley). And: “The Master said, “When it comes to Goodness (*ren*), one need not avoid competing with one’s teacher” (15.36; trans. A. Waley). As we see, no one can replace the particular person in its activity and objectives, not even such worthy and wise men as teachers. No one can use a particular individual as a mere implement or instrument to achieve any goals, no matter how noble-minded they would be. Confucians recognize the continual interchange of all circumstances and conditions, therefore they do agree to the fact that there cannot exist any kind of universal and abstract rules of moral action, which could be simply followed without any creative attempt to revise them according to the particular circumstances. So the Confucian personality at every turn faces the call to sum up the situation, to make a decision and to behave with the full responsibility following his “heart-mind” (*xin* 心). At this point the Confucian personality surprisingly reminds us of the ideal of the individual raised by existentialists of the 20th century.

What does *ke ji* really mean in *The Analects*?

We have already quoted in this paper one of the most controversial passages of *Lun Yu*: “Yan Hui inquired about authoritative conduct (*ren* 仁). The Master replied, “Through self-discipline and observing ritual propriety (*li* 礼) one becomes authoritative in one’s conduct (*ke ji fu li wei ren* 克己复礼为仁). If for the space of a day one were able to accomplish this, the whole empire would defer to this authoritative model. Becoming authoritative in one’s conduct is self-originating – how could it originate with others?” (12.1). This passage, in our

²⁸ Roetz, *Confucian Ethics*, 154.

opinion, should be regarded as the focal axis of all *Lun Yu*, not because it is placed in the very middle of this Confucian canon, but rather because it talks over the fundamental conceptions of Confucian ethical person – *ren* and *li* – and apparently shows their interrelation. Moreover, hardly a single scholar inquiring into the ethical views of Confucius or of the classical Confucians could avoid the reference to this passage, a more or less comprehensive explanation of the meaning and significance of this excerpt. The way one understands the passage 12.1 of *The Analects* influences the grasp of the whole text and especially the interpretation of the status of the personality in classical Confucianism, and *vice versa*. Thereto it is indispensable for us to provide our point of view.

The term *ke ji* (克己) was mostly translated as “to overcome the self”, “to control oneself”, “to master oneself”, “to discipline oneself”, “to subdue oneself”, and sometimes “is able himself to”²⁹. Often this very important part of *The Analects* is understood negatively, because into *ke ji* (overcoming oneself) was infused a negative meaning – “to conquer oneself”, “to subdue oneself”, i. e. the term *ke ji* was understood as a strict demand to suppress one’s own individuality, one’s own uniqueness in society’s favor. For some scholars such an interpretation served as an argument proving that classical Confucianism denies the ideal of the morally valuable, conscious, self-reflective personality possessing free will. For others who believe that the general context of *Lun Yu* proves to the contrary, and that the initial purpose of Confucius to state the importance of practical embodiment of the ideal of *jun zi* cannot be refuted even by posterior sophistications and manipulations of Confucius’ ideas, the percept of *ke ji fu li* in the passage 12.1 appeared somewhat complicated and ambivalent.

Thus, it is obvious that we subscribe to the opinion of the later. Yet we also assume that the impression of discrepancy may be overcome simply by revising the translation of *ke ji* (克己). The character *ji* 己 means “the self”, the pronoun of the third person, and does not raise any difficulties. As a first meaning of *ke* 克 *The Ancient – Modern Chinese Dictionary*³⁰ indicates *sheng ren* 胜任 – “to be competent; be qualified”, the second meaning being *neng gou* 能够 – “can; be able to; be capable of”. The next meaning of *ke* is explained by *wan cheng* 完成 – “accomplish; complete; fulfil; bring to success (or fruition)”. And only then the dictionary provides the meaning of *ke* as “to defeat; to overcome” (*zhan sheng* 战胜; *da bai* 打败) and “to restrain” (*ke zhi* 克制). Furthermore, considering the fact that classical Confucians have induced the self-perfection of personality (*xiu shen* 修身), self-reflection and self-examination (*xing shen* 省身; *nei xing* 内省), self-respect (*jing ji* 敬己), and also have declared the freedom of choosing one’s own model of life, one’s own Way, and even more, have required a full responsibility for one’s words, thoughts and deeds, we are more inclined to agree with Tu Weiming who states: “The Confucian idea [of *ke ji*] does not mean that one should engage in a bitter struggle with one’s corporeal desires. It suggests instead that one

²⁹ See Hall, Ames, *Thinking*, 124.

³⁰ 古今汉语词典。—北京：商务印书馆，2000。

should fulfil them in an ethical context. The concept of *ke ji* is in fact closely linked to the concept of self-cultivation (*xiu shen*)³¹. A very similar idea later was also expressed by Hsei-Yung Hsu: “the Confucian notion of “to subdue oneself” [*ke ji*] cannot be merely understood as the suppression of one’s bodily desires. Rather, it is closely related to the concept self-cultivation if we put the notion of “to subdue oneself” in the moral context”³².

We would state even more strongly than Tu Weiming does, that the self-perfection (*xiu shen*), self-examination (*xing shen*), self-respect (*jing ji*), self-consciousness, free will and full responsibility for one’s own actions are constituents of one common project named by Confucius *ke ji*, which we suggest to translate (if the meaning of the “overcoming”, “subduing” has to be maintained) as “to overcome *one’s narrowness*” or “to overcome *one’s limitation*” or – even better – “to accomplish oneself”. This Confucius’ instruction resembles the instruction of the Delphic oracle: “know thyself”. The Confucian personality has to examine and to understand himself, has to be fully open to himself and to the world, in order to be able to fulfil the instruction of Confucius and to reach his own limits. And when someone reaches one’s own limits one also expands them.

Confucius did not maintain that human nature is initially good (as later was stated by one of his disciples, Meng Zi 孟子), nor did he maintain that human nature is initially bad (as Xun Zi 荀子, another disciple of Confucius, supposed). Master Kong only said: “human beings are similar in their natural tendencies (*xing* 性), but vary greatly by virtue of their habits” (17.2). The antipode of the exemplary person (*jun zi*) is called *xiao ren* 小人, what literally means “a small man”, “a little person”, “a slight person”. The essential defect of petty persons (*xiao ren*) is their spiritual obscurantism, their incapability to realize their own imperfection. Without consciousness there is no way for the demand of change and perfection to come up. As Confucius said, “only the most wise and the most stupid do not move” (17.3).

When *ke ji* is conceived in the way we suggest, the passage 12.1 does not discord with the general context of *Lun Yu*. Even more, it displays the fundamental meaning of the moral conduct (*ren* 仁): one has to enlarge one’s sphere of *ego*, narrow and limited by nature, in order to embrace others, to involve in one’s realm of concern one’s family, neighbors, country, even nature. According to classical Confucianism, only *jun zi* is capable of achieving this goal and no one can replace him in this practice. Thus, as we read in *The Analects*, “becoming authoritative in one’s conduct [*ren*] is self-originating [*you ji* 由己] – how could it originate with others?” (12.1). Thus the Confucian personality is essentially founded in this special *ke ji* project, therefore the Confucian personality cannot be reduced to an atomic isolated entity, nor can it be defined simply by the social role of its existence.

To sum it up, we are prone to state that in translating Confucius’ idea (not merely his words) more adequate translation of *ke ji* would be “to expand oneself”. This translation would also better reflect the first meaning of the word *ke* 克: *ke ji* as “expanding

³¹ Cited in accordance to Hall, Ames, *Thinking Through*, 124.

³² Hsu, “Confucius”, 331.

oneself“ would denote the action of becoming *competent*, becoming *qualified* to fulfil the ideal of a free, responsible and dynamic individual, the exemplary person *jun zi*. A similar idea is suggested by Hall and Ames in explaining the meaning of the term *ren*: “The authoritative person [*ren* 仁] is one who not only extends his sphere of concern to embrace and serve the interests of his community, but who literally extends himself to take in this community“³³. In the image of the exemplary person, or *jun zi*, as it was drawn by Confucius and early Confucians and in our so-called *ke ji*, or the project of expanding one’s own limits, we may find an example and proof that it is possible to conquer one’s own selfishness without losing one’s selfhood.

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ASMENIŠKUMO PERŽENGIMAS (KE JI) KONFUCIJAUS APMAŠTYMUOSE IR PAŠNEKESIUOSE: ASMENYBĖS PABAIGA AR JOS STEIGTIS?

Vytis Silius

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje analizuojama klasikiniame konfucianizme, konkrečiai Konfucijaus *Apmąstymuose ir pašnekesiuose* atskleista asmenybės samprata, sukoncentruota „kilnaus žmogaus“ (*jun zi*) ideale. Siekiama parodyti, kokiomis savybėmis, anot Konfucijaus, tokia ideali etinė asmenybė pasižymi. Straipsnyje atskleidžiama dviejų pagrindinių konfucianistinių etinių kategorijų *ren* ir *li* reikšmė formuojantis savitai konfucianistinei asmenybei. Taip pat bandoma atrasti tuos svarbiausius bruožus, kurie būtų vienodai suprantami ir atpažįstami tiek klasikinio konfucianizmo, tiek europietiška žmogaus kaip asmenybės sampratai. Kita straipsnio dalis skirta parodyti kaip tampama *jun zi*, t. y. idealia etine asmenybe. Nagrinėjama, ką Konfucijaus tekste reiškia *ke ji* kategorija, kokią įtaką ji daro bendrai asmenybės koncepcijai. Pasiūlomas kitoks nei įsigalėjusi vertimų tradicija, *ke ji* vertimas.

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