

The Confucian Chun Tzu: The Search for True Nobility

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Introduction:

The concept of the *Chun Tzu* personifies the whole system of Confucian moral teachings. It is also instrumental in forming the racial and cultural identity of the Chinese people. It serves as a paradigm of perfection and self-cultivation. It also embodies the noblest aspiration of man for perfection and self-cultivation. It also embodies the noblest aspiration of man for perfection and self-fulfillment, as affirmed by Liu Shu Hsien.¹

Let us first investigate the *Chun Tzu* in its etymology. The term is composed of two noun-characters: *Chun* and *Tzu*.

Chun consists of the characters *Yin* and *Kou*. The character *Yin* means a magistrate or a verb which means to govern as represented by a hand that exerts authority. The character *Kou*, on the other hand, implies a commanding act. As a composite character, it is a prince with hands wielding executive powers and a mouth connoting legislative powers.²

The second character is the *Tzu*.³ Pictographically it represents a newborn child swathed so that his legs would not be visible. In an ancient form, it has the hair. Thus it connotes a son or, by extension, a disciple, a sage or a teacher

¹Liu Shu Hsien and Peter K.H. Lee: "A Confucian-Christian Dialogue: Liberating Life as a Commitment to Truth": *Ching Feng* 33 (1990) p. 166.

²Wieger, Leon: *Chinese Characters*. L. Chevrouet (tr.) New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1964, p. 122.

³Wilder and Ingram, *Analysis of Chinese Characters* (Taipei: n.p. n.d.), p. 1.

honored by emperors who bestowed upon them the appellation of “Tzu.” Thus by its etymology, we can say that the *Chun Tzu* is a prince, a ruler's son.

Evolution of the Concept

The concept of the *Chun Tzu* can be said to be as old as the feudal system in China itself. In Ancient China, society was divided into two classes: the rulers known as the *Chun Tzu*, and the ruled or the *Hsiao Jen*. Thus the *Chun Tzu* was looked up to as a paradigm of power, moral uprightness and wisdom. This would be a perfectly natural course of thought in a stringent feudal society such as that in Ancient China.

Prior to Confucius, the *Chun Tzu* was understood in the literal sense, that is, a prince, a master or a husband which is reflected in its usage as found in the classic *Shih Ching*. In this ancient classic, the *Chun Tzu* is used

- 1) In a domestic sense which is translated as “my Lord” as spoken by wife, mistress, girl or retainer, 36 times;
- 2) In reference to public administrative and political figures, 33 times;
- 3) In the moral sense, with distinct ethical overtones, 14 times.

This gives us a glimpse of the ethical trend within a feudal framework.⁴ This account the 67 citations of the *Chun Tzu* as found in the in the *Shih Ching* are also cited in some instances under two different headings, which is tabulated as follows:⁵

	Aristocratic Sense	Domestic Sense
Domestic Use	36	
Public Use	33	
In contrast with the		
<i>Hsiao Jen</i>	2	2
Applied to Women	3	
Ethical Use		14
Total	74	16

During the time of Confucius, the *Chun Tzu* assumed a new personality, different from its pre-Confucian notions. Instead of being a mere nobleman, Confucius conceived it as a noble-man as reflected in the many citations in the *Lun Yu*. With this the *Chun Tzu* assumed a moral personality.

⁴These instances occur in Songs number 28, 49, 55, 152, 172, 173, 174, 191.5, 194.3 207, 215, 223.6, 249 and 251.

⁵W. Scott Morton: “The Confucian Concept of Man: Original Formulation” *Philosophy East and West*, 21 (1971) p. 70.

In the *Lun Yu*, the term *Chun Tzu* appears in 65 citations and in all but three instances, or almost 95%, the term is used in the ethical sense which stands for noble-man or an ideal man. It must be noted that for *Chun Tzu* in the *Lun Yu* is not just used proto-ethically as it is found in the *Shih Ching* but fully and deliberately ethical. At the same time, the vestige of its aristocratic origin is still carried over by the new meaning, for these two notions in the mind of Confucius seem to overlap.⁶ This concept came about with the assertion of Confucius that a *Chun Tzu* need not be a person of noble birth but one whose conduct was a matter of goodmorals and sound character.⁷

Thus a *Chun Tzu* is a noble-man whose virtues and relations are actualized to perfection. Consequently, a country should not be ruled by a dynasty based on inheritance through birth, but by members of the nobility who show outstanding moral qualifications for rulership. That is to say, the rule should pass from the worthier to the worthiest. And who could be worthier than the *Chun Tzu* – the noble-man?

The *Chun Tzu* in the *Lun Yu* is presented as an image of perfection, a prototype of moral uprightness which Confucius would like to be ingrained in the hearts and minds of his disciples who desired to attain the highest possible state in the ethical sphere.

Though Confucius may have spoken of other models in the classics,⁸ passages on the *Chun Tzu* seem to be very varied and the very explicit. We may, therefore, deduce that this concept might have played an important catalysis towards the completion of his moral thought.

The passages on the *Chun Tzu* can be categorized as follows:

1. passages in connection with what a *Chun Tzu* ought to do about himself;
2. the *Chun Tzu* and his relationships;
3. The *Chun Tzu* in contrast with the *Hsiao Jen*.⁹

In our study of the concept of the *Chun Tzu* we shall more or less follow the above pattern.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁷Hilda Hookham, *A Short History of China*. (New York: 1972), p. 52.

⁸The other models are *Shih Jen*, *Shan Jen*, *Shien Jen*, *Cheng Jen*, and the *Sheng Jen* or the sage. Except for the *Sheng Jen*, all the rest are under the category of the *Chun Tzu*. If so, following the principle that the qualities of the less perfect are virtually contained in the qualities of the most perfect, a *Chun Tzu* is a *Shan Jen* a *Shien Jen* and a *Cheng Jen*.

⁹Chang Chi Yun: "Model Types of Man by Confucian Standards" *Chinese Cultures*, 24 (1983), p. 7).

The Concept of the *Chun Tzu*

The *Chun Tzu* can well be considered as the crystalization of the Confucian moral principles of the *Jen*, *Yi*, and *Li*. He is an ideal that has been incarnated to reality.

A *Chun Tzu* is a man who upholds the *Jen*:

"If a superior man (*Chun Tzu*) abandons virtue (*Jen*), how can he fulfill the requirements of that name? The Superior man does not, even for the space of a single meal, act contrary to virtue. In moments of haste, he cleaves to it. In seasons of danger, he cleaves to it."¹⁰

Likewise, the *Chun Tzu* upholds the *Yi*:

"The Master said: 'The superior man (*Chun Tzu*) holds righteousness (*Yi*) to be of highest importance. A man in a superior situation, having valor without right righteousness will be guilty of insubordination; one of the lower people having valor without righteousness will commit robbery.'¹¹

The *Chun Tzu*, as Confucius also tells us, is a scrupulous follower of the dictates of the *Li*, which rules his social and personal life.

"The Master said: 'The Superior Man (*Chun Tzu*) extensively studying all learning and keeping himself under the restraint of the rules of propriety (*Li*), must thus likewise not overstep what is right.'¹²

In Chapter 12 of the *Lun Yu*, Confucius noted the strong bond between the *Chun Tzu* and the principle of the *Li*:

"Let the superior man (*Chun Tzu*) conduct and let him be respectful to others and observant of propriety – then all within the four seas will be brothers. What has the superior man to do with being distressed because he has no brothers?"¹³

This gives the assurance that the *Chun Tzu* is never alone in his pursuit for perfection. We can, therefore, say that the *Chun Tzu* is a man of the *Li* and of the *Yi*. Confucius tells us that:

"The superior man (*Chun Tzu*) in everything considers righteousness to be essential. He performs it according to the rules of propriety. He brings

¹⁰*Lun Yu* 4:5.

¹¹*Lun Yu* 17:23. Ku's translation is clearer "A Gentleman (*Chun Tzu*)," answered Confucius, "esteems what is right as the highest importance. A gentleman who has valour, but is without knowledge and love of what is right is likely to commit a crime. A man of the people (*Hsiao Jen*) who has courage, but is without the knowledge and love of what is right is likely to become a robber."

¹²*Lun Yu* 6:25.

¹³*Lun Yu* 12:5.

it forth in humility. He completes it with sincerity. This is indeed a superior man!"¹⁴

His pleasure can only be found in perfect accordance with the *Tao* (truth) – making him a man of *Tao*:

"The Master said: 'The superior man (*Chun Tzu*) is easy to serve and difficult to please. If you try to please him in any way which is not in accordance with right, he will not be pleased. But in his employment of men, he uses them according to their capacity. The mean man (*Hsiao Jen*) is difficult to serve, and easy to please. If you try to please him, though it may be in a way accordant with right, he may be pleased. But in his employment of men, he wishes to be equal in everything.'"¹⁵

The *Chun Tzu* can be defined as a man for others. With this consideration in mind, a *Chun Tzu* cultivates himself not for his own sake but for the good of all. Confucius indicated this point in his dialogue with his disciple Tzu Lu:

"Tzu Lu asked what constituted the superior man (*Chun Tzu*). The Master said: 'The cultivation of himself in reverential carefulness!' 'And is that all?' said Tzu Lu. 'He cultivates himself so as to give rest to others,' was the answer. 'And is that all?' again asked Tzu Lu. The Master said: 'He cultivates himself so as to give rest to all the peoples – even Yao and Shun were still solicitous about this.'"¹⁶

And thus this reverential cultivation of the self is the peculiar characteristic of the *Chun Tzu*.

What really constitutes the moral personality of the *Chun Tzu*? Confucius enumerates the four qualities that are to be found in a person who can be considered as a *Chun Tzu*:

"... He showed himself to be a superior man (*Chun Tzu*) in four ways. In his conduct of himself, he was earnest, and in serving the interests of his prince, he was serious. In providing for the wants of the people, he was generous and in dealing with them, he was just."¹⁷

The *Chun Tzu* is a man of learning, his main life-pursuit is to seek the *Tao* at all cause:

"The Master said: 'The object of the Superior man (*Chun Tzu*) is truth (*Tao*). Food is not his object. There is ploughing; even in that, there is sometimes want! So with learning, emolument maybe found in it. The superior man is anxious lest he should not get truth, he is not anxious lest poverty should come upon him.'"¹⁸

¹⁴*Lun Yu* 15:17.

¹⁵*Lun Yu*, 13:25. Legge translates it as "right" while Ku translates this as "duty."

¹⁶*Lun Yu* 14:46.

¹⁷*Lun Yu*, 5:15.

¹⁸*Lun Yu*, 15:31.

Likewise, his great reverence for the wisdom of the past ages is something for us to emulate:

"Confucius said: 'There are three things at which the superior man stands in awe. He stands in awe at the ordinances of heaven (*T'ien Ming*). He stands in awe of great men. He stands in awe of the words of the sage.'"¹⁹

Thus the *Tao* of the *Chun Tzu* is threefold; all who aspire to be one must follow wholeheartedly:

"Virtuous, he is free from anxieties; Wise, he is free from perplexities; Bold, he is free from fear."²⁰

The *Chun Tzu*, fearless as he is, is gracious in his victory and honorable in his defeat:

"The Master said: 'A superior man (*Chun Tzu*) never competes in anything he does – except perhaps in archery. But even then, when he wins, he courteously makes his bow before he advances to take his place among the winners; and when he has lost, he walks down and drinks his cup of forfeit. Thus, even in this case of competition, he shows himself to be a superior man.'"²¹

He is also humble enough to accept his own limitations and is not ashamed of them:

"The Master said: 'The *Chun Tzu* is distressed by his want of ability. He is not distressed by men's not knowing it.'"²²

His character is pliant yet firm, for a *Chun Tzu* is correctly firm and not firm merely.²³ That is why the *Chun Tzu* is likened to a bamboo tree which stands majestically and sways flexibly at every whisper of the wind.

The life of the *Chun Tzu* is simple. His aim in life is to pursue the cultivation of self to restore the *Li*. That is why in his lifetime, the *Chun Tzu* makes it a point to guard himself with great constancy against the greatest enemy of his perfection: his inordinate desires.

"Confucius said: 'There are three things which the superior man (*Chun Tzu*) guards against. In youth, when the physical powers are not yet settled, he guards against lust. When he is strong and the physical powers

¹⁹*Lun Yu*, 16:8.

²⁰*Lun Yu* 14:30.

²¹*Lun Yu* 15:18.

²²*Lun Yu*, 3:7.

²³*Lun Yu* 15:36. And both imply firmness but supposes a moral and intelligent basis which is absent in the rest.

are full of vigor, he guards against quarrelsomeness. When he is old and the animal (sentient) powers are decayed, he guards against covetousness'.²⁴

That is why, he who aspires to be a *Chun Tzu* must be able to live austere without much regard for pleasure.

"The Master said: 'He who aims to be a *Chun Tzu* in his food does not seek to gratify his appetite nor in his dwelling place does he seek the appliances of ease; he is earnest in what he is doing and careful in his speech; he frequents the company of men of principle that he may be rectified – such a person may be said to love and learn'.²⁵

A *Chun Tzu* acts with great cautiousness and the outcome of his actions are his constant thought:

"In regard to the use of his eyes, he is anxious to see clearly. In regard to the use of his ears, he is anxious to hear distinctly. In regard to the countenance, he is anxious to be sincere. In regard to his doing business, he is anxious to be reverently careful. In regard to what he doubts about, he is anxious to question others. When he is angry, he thinks of the difficulties (his anger may involve him in). When he sees gain to be got, he thinks of righteousness.²⁶

With this cautiousness, his conduct becomes very commendable:

"The Master said: 'The *Chun Tzu* is dignified, but does not wrangle. He is sociable but not partisan'.²⁷

Because

"The *Chun Tzu* wishes to be slow in his speech and earnest in his conduct.²⁸

A *Chun Tzu* shuns hypocrisy and self-importance. Thus abhorrence to such vices were also manifested by Confucius himself:

"The Master said: 'Fine words, an insinuating appearance, and excessive respect – Tso Chiu Ming was ashamed of them. I also am ashamed of them. To conceal resentment against a person, and appear friendly with him – Tso Chiu Ming was ashamed of such conduct. I am also ashamed of it'.²⁹

As to the words and actions of a *Chun Tzu*, Confucius tells us that:

²⁴*Lun Yu*, 16:7.

²⁵*Lun Yu*, 1:14.

²⁶*Lun Yu*, 16:10.

²⁷*Lun Yu*, 4:21.

²⁸*Lun Yu*, 4:24.

²⁹*Lun Yu*, 5:24.

"He (the *Chun Tzu*) acts before he speaks, and afterwards speaks according to his actions."³⁰

The *Chun Tzu* then is more of a "doer" than a "talker." In fact in chapter 14 of the *Lun Yu*, Confucius defines a *Chun Tzu* as such:

"The Master said: 'The superior man (*Chun Tzu*) is modest in his speech, but exceeds in his actions.'"³¹

Thus words must never be a measure of the *Chun Tzu* or any man for that matter. For the measure of a real man is not in his speech full of sophistry and rhetoric but in his action which is more eloquent.

"The Master said: 'If because a man's discourse appears solid and sincere, (to be a good man) is he really a *Chun Tzu*? or his gravity only in appearance?'"³²

The *Chun Tzu* is content in his station of life. Though he may not assume any important position either in business or government, his virtues and character are more enough to satisfy his needs:

"Tseng Tzu said: 'The *Chun Tzu* in his thoughts does not go out of his place.'"

Confucius tells us that:

Is he not a *Chun Tzu* who feels no discomposure though man takes no note of him?"³³

Thus a *Chun Tzu* is a man of clear conscience, for his life is imbued with the Kingly *Tao* mandated by *T'ien* to be a man of *Jen*, *Yi* and *Li*:

"Ssu-ma Niu asked about the '*Chun Tzu*, The Master said: The *Chun Tzu*, has neither anxiety nor fear. Being without fear' said Niu,' does this constitute what we call the *Chun Tzu*?' The Master said: 'When internal examination discovers nothing wrong, what is there to be anxious about, what is there to fear?'"³⁴

The *Chun Tzu* and the *Hsiao Jen*:

If the *Chun Tzu* is the model of virtue and noble character, the *Hsiao Jen* is its antithesis.

Like the *Chun Tzu*, the *Hsiao Jen* is derived from the feudalistic societal ideas prevalent during the time of Confucius where there existed two types of

³⁰*Lun Yu*, 14.

³¹*Lun Yu*, 14:29.

³²*Lun Yu*, 11:20.

³³*Lun Yu*, 14:28.

³⁴*Lun Yu*, 12:14.

man: the noble and the commoner. This commoner, in their concept, is unlearned, ignorant of the principles of the *Li* and thus unworthy of attention. That is why the main preoccupation of the sovereign is that they would lead and regulate the commoners – *Hsiao Jen*. This belief is apparently reflected in the political philosophy of Confucius where virtue and personal perfection are prerequisites of an ideal ruler, since to govern means to rectify, and to govern the people is to lead them to virtue.³⁵

From the concept of the *Hsiao Jen*, we can further draw important qualities of the *Chun Tzu* as presented by the Master himself.

The *Hsiao Jen* abhors virtue and is adamant in doing evil:

"The Master said: The superior man (*Chun Tzu*) and yet not always virtuous? There have been, alas! But never has been a mean man (*Hsiao Jen*) and at the same time virtuous."³⁶

He (the *Hsiao Jen*) seeks not to perfect his inherent qualities but chooses otherwise:

"The Master said: The superior man (*Chun Tzu*) seeks to perfect the admirable qualities of men, and does not seek to perfect their bad qualities. The mean man (*Hsiao Jen*) does the opposite of this."³⁷

This is why, the *Hsiao Jen* lives in great irresponsible license:

"The Master said: 'The superior man (*Chun Tzu*) thinks of virtue; the small man (*Hsiao Jen*) thinks of the sanctions of the laws; the small man thinks of favors which he may receive'."³⁸

In contrast with the *Hsiao Jen* the test of *Chun Tzu*'s character is that he must endure the tests of difficulties:

"Tzu-Lu with evident dissatisfaction said: 'Has the superior man (*Chun Tzu*) likewise to endure in this way?' The Master said: 'The superior man may indeed have to endure want but the mean man (*Hsiao Jen*) when he is in want gives way to unbridled licence'."³⁹

Yet despite these difficulties, he is satisfied and contented:

"The Master said: 'The superior man (*Chun Tzu*) is satisfied and composed; the mean man (*Hsiao Jen*) is always full of distress'."⁴⁰

³⁶Francis Y. P. Chin: *Confucius and Aristotle: A Comparative Study on the Confucian and Aristotelian Political Ideals* (Taipei: The Committee for Compilation and Examination of the Series of Chinese Classics, 1981). p. 160.

³⁷*Lun Yu*, 14:11.

³⁸*Lun Yu*, 12:16.

³⁹*Lun Yu*, 4:11.

⁴⁰*Lun Yu*, --15:1.

⁴¹*Lun Yu*, 7:36.

That is why a *Chun Tzu* is trustworthy:

"The Master said: 'the superior man (*Chun Tzu*) cannot be known in little matters; but may be entrusted with great concerns. The small man (*Hsiao Jen*) may not be entrusted with great concerns but he may be known in little matters'."⁴¹

For he acts with righteousness and with great independence.

"The Master said: 'The mind of the Superior Man (*Chun Tzu*) is conversant with righteousness; the mind of the mean man (*Hsiao Jen*) is conversant with gain.'"⁴²

"The Master said: 'What the superior man (*Chun Tzu*) seeks is in himself. What the mean man (*Hsiao Tzu*) seeks is in others'."⁴³

The character of the *Chun Tzu* makes him superior over the *Hsiao Jen* for his affability and dignity:

"The Master said: 'The superior man (*Chun Tzu*) is affable, but not adulatory; the mean man (*Hsiao Jen*) is adulatory but not affable'."⁴⁴

And in his progress as a person is upwards:

"The Master said: 'The progress of the superior man (*Chun Tzu*) is upwards; the progress of the mean man (*Hsiao Jen*) is downwards'."⁴⁵

The *Chun Tzu* and Education:

The concept of the *Chun Tzu* stresses the need for self-cultivation, which could only be realized through the process of education. In fact, education and the *Chun Tzu* enjoy a very close relation for the latter can only be effected by education.

For Confucius, and the Chinese for that matter, education is not only the development of the thinking man but also that of the acting man. In fact, the crux of Confucian education lies in the development of one's own personality rather than upon knowledge for its own sake.⁴⁶ Thus with this in mind, Confucius made knowledge, borne out of the process of education, the foundation of human excellence:

"The Master said: 'When a man's knowledge is sufficient to attain, and his virtue is not sufficient to enable him to hold whatever he may have

⁴¹*Lun Yu*, 15:33.

⁴²*Lun Yu*, 4:16.

⁴³*Lun Yu*, 15:20.

⁴⁴*Lun Yu*, 13:23.

⁴⁵*Lun Yu*, 13:26.

⁴⁶Ch'u Chai and Winberg Chai: *The Story of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1961) p. 22

gained, he will lose again. When his knowledge is sufficient to attain and he has virtue enough to hold fast, if he cannot govern with dignity, the people will not respect him. When his knowledge is sufficient to attain, and he has virtue enough to hold fast; when he governs, also with dignity, yet if he tries to move the people contrary to the rules of propriety: Full excellence is not reached'.⁴⁷

Without education, the man in ignorance, though he may be potentially virtuous, will be unable to perform these desired virtues with facility:

"The Master said: 'Yu, have you heard the six wordsto which are attached the six becloudings?' Yu replied: 'I have not.' 'Sit down and I will tell them to you. There is the love of being benevolent without the love of learning; the beclouding here leads to dissipation of the mind. There is the love of straight forwardness without the love for learning; the beclouding here leads to rudeness. There is the love of boldness without the love of learning; the beclouding here leads to insubordination. There is the love of firmness without the love of learning; the beclouding there leads to extravagant conduct.'⁴⁸

Education becomes the catalysis towards the ordering of the whole human life towards the life of virtue. And a person possessing this life of virtue could only be a *Chun Tzu*:

"The Master said: 'Where the solid qualities are in excess of accomplishments, we have rusticity. Where the accomplishments are in excess of solid qualities, we have the manner of the clerk. When the accomplishments and solid qualities are equally blended, we then have the man of virtue (*Chun Tzu*).'⁴⁹

The basic factor underlying the zeal of Confucius in educating all men was his conviction that men are largely alike and equal at birth. They are only set apart by the habits and idiosyncrasies they acquire in life. His concern was to ensure that education lead man to select that which is good⁵⁰ not only for himself but for all as well.

Confucius believed that man in the process of education, must first identify himself from within by orienting on his nature and potentialities towards goodness and virtue. This will give him a sense of self-identity and self-acceptance. Out of this self-awareness comes a sense of security in his social relations which naturally becomes self-diffusive: *Bonum Diffusivum Sui*.⁵¹

Hsu Meng Ying said that Confucian education aims to educate people to practice the policy of benevolent government by teaching the ways of the *Chun*

⁴⁷Lun Yu, 15:32.

⁴⁸Lun Yu, 17:8.

⁴⁹Lun Yu, 6:16.

⁵⁰Ch'ai, *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁵¹Jose Antonio Auread: "Kong Zi and the Center of the Self" *The UST Journal of Theology* 5 (1904) p. 154.

Tzu, instead of referring simply to a member of the aristocratic class. It placed more emphasis on behavior. Thus, it was not restricted to one level of the social strata.⁵²

No individual can reach excellence until he enters into the degree of universal love. All human values are created in the mutual "I-Thou" relationship which is applied to the Confucian concept of the *Chun Tzu*.⁵³ As Confucius himself once remarked:

"He who practices it will have neighbors."⁵⁴ Personal perfection necessarily rests in caring for others, it is expressive, for the good and the beautiful presuppose a social dimension, a common consent and mutual esteem, a balanced and complete development of a person's potential for the good of others, of the society, of the world and of the whole universe.⁵⁵

Thus with a play of words, Aureada defines the *Chun Tzu*, in its English translation as that "man, because he is born to become a super-gentleman and because of his moral values. Thus when once he is attuned with these values, he ends up Gentle, that is virtuous. One who knows how to stand in the middle and knows how to think and act proper to his human nature."⁵⁶

The *Chun Tzu* and the End of Confucian Philosophy

From the tone of our discussion of the *Chun Tzu*, we may be tempted to conclude that the *Chun Tzu* might perhaps be the personality that would best exemplify the end of the whole Confucian system. Despite the fact that the *Chun Tzu* was the primary concern of the Master in his lectures, the *Sheng Jen* or the Sage was the main objective of his philosophical musings. Thus it is the Confucian ideal man, just as the great souled or the magnanimous man in Aristotelian philosophy.⁵⁷

The term *Sheng Jen* is the Chinese equivalent of the Greek "Hagios" or the Latin "Sanctus" though *Sheng* does not contain the cultic meaning as does the Greek "Hagios."⁵⁸ According to the *Shou Wen Chieh Tzu*,⁵⁹ a sage is one who possesses a penetrating intelligence regarding all affairs. This is re-echoed

⁵²Cfr. Hsu Meng Ying: "Kung Tzu and Chiao Yu Shih Shiang" *Kuang Ming Jih Pao* 6-14-1954, as quoted by Kam, Louie: *Critique of Confucius in Contemporary China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1980), p. 39.

⁵³Chih, *Op. cit.*, p. 405.

⁵⁴*Lun Yu*, 4:25.

⁵⁵Chih, *Op. cit.*, p. 405.

⁵⁶Aureada, *Op. cit.*, p. 154.

⁵⁷Pedro Gabriel: "Confucian Ethics" *Unitas* 55 (1982) p. 578.

⁵⁸Julia Ching: *Confucianism and Christianity* (New York: Kodansha International, 1977) p. 80.

⁵⁹*Shuo Wen Chieh Tzu* written Hsu Shen about 1000 A.D. is the first Chinese dictionary to use the system of radicals for classification. This collection is divided into 540 radical sections. It is the best authority for the study of the filological development of the Chinese written language.

in the classic *Po Hu T'ung Yi*⁶⁰ which describes the *Sheng Jen* as one "possessing a way which penetrates everywhere, a brilliance which radiates everywhere" as one who "is in union with Heaven and Earth in his virtuous, with the sun and moon in his brilliance, with the four seasons in his regularity, and with ghost and spirits in his gifts of divining fortunes and misfortunes."⁶¹

In the *Chung Yung*, the classic explicitly enumerates the many virtuous attributes of a *Sheng Jen* – which is recorded in Chapter 22. In the *Lun Yu*, however, we find a certain aloofness and reluctance of the Master to discuss the *Sheng Jen*. Though Confucius referred to himself as their admirer and follower. He was a student, so to say, a man who too sought perfection, desired the state of the *Sheng Jen* and made efforts to achieve it in life.

"The Master said: 'The sage and the man of perfect virtue (*Sheng Jen* and the *Jen Jen*), how do I rank myself with them: It may simply be said to me that I strive to become such without satiety, and teach others without weariness,' Kung Ssu Hwa said: 'This is just what we disciples cannot imitate you in!'"⁶²

Confucius' high regard for the *Sheng Jen* is further expressed by his silence than by his words. His modesty is partly motivated by his great esteem of this state which, as he put it:

"A sage (*Sheng Jen*) is not mine to see; could I see a man of real talent and virtue (*Chun Tzu*) that would satisfy me?"⁶³

Where Confucius declines to call himself as a sage, later generations did not share the same scruple. They were particularly quick in recognizing him as a sage, and even as the sage *par excellence*. This is hinted at the *Chung Yung* which described him as a man who traces himself to the rich and sublime patrimony of the sage kings Yao and Shun whom he considered as his spiritual ancestors:

"Chung Ni handed down the doctrines of Yao and Shun as if they had been his ancestors and gently displayed the regulations of *Wen* (Literary Arts) and *Wu* (Martial Arts) as his model. Above, he harmonized with the times of Heaven, and below, he was conformed to the water and land. He may be compared to the four seasons in their alternating progress, and to the sun and moon in their successive shining."⁶⁴

⁶⁰*Po Hu T'ung Yi* or the "Comprehensive Discussions of the White Tiger Hall" is a collection of four Chuans in 44 chapters based on the discussions and philosophical colloquies on the classics by eminent scholars in 79 A.D. Traditionally ascribed to Pan Ku (32-92 A.D.) who also authored the famous *Ch'ien Han Su* or the "Book of the Earlier Han."

⁶¹Pan Ku: *Po Hu Tung Yi* (Taipei: 1968) p. 276-281 as cited by Ching, *Op. cit.*, p. 80.

⁶²*Lun Yu*, 7:33.

⁶³*Lun Yu*, 7:25.

⁶⁴*Lun Yu*, 7:25.

The *Chun Tzu* and the *Sheng Jen*

If the *Sheng Jen* is the ideal man of the Confucian system where does the concept of the *Chun Tzu* come in? We must therefore first differentiate the two.

The *Sheng Jen*, due to the constant exercise of virtue and good conduct, has already reached the degree of perfection which is the union with Heaven. Whereas the *Chun Tzu* is one who is still in the process of becoming a *Sheng Jen*.

The *Sheng Jen* implies natural and unrestrained trained accordance to the *Tao* of Heaven; whereas the *Chun Tzu* implies endeavor in following it faithfully.⁶⁵ This difference made *Chu Hsi* to conclude that the *Sheng Jen* is more sublime than the *Chun Tzu* for it has virtue and ability realized in a person.⁶⁶

In relation to the *Sheng Jen*, the *Chun Tzu* becomes the man wishing to reach the state of sageliness though he may have attained that moral state, his principles would not allow him to assume that appellation. That is why the title of the *Sheng Jen* is conferred posthumously to those who lived virtuously and were exceptional *Chun Tzus*. It can be recalled here that the philosophers of Ancient Greece were also humble that they did not dare call themselves "the wise" but were contented in calling themselves as "Lovers of Wisdom." Analogously, a *Chun Tzu* is a lover of virtue and a *Sheng Jen* is virtue personified.

Thus the *Chun Tzu* seeks to carry out and actualizes his nature in imitation of the *Sheng Jen* in its breadth and greatness:

"Therefore the Superior Man (*Chun Tzu*) honors his virtuous nature, and maintains constant inquiry and study, seeking to carry it out to its breadth and greatness, so as to omit none of the more exquisite and minute points which embraces; to raise it to its greatest height and brilliancy, so as to pursue the course of the mean. He cherishes his old knowledge and is continually acquiring a new. He exerts an honest generous earnestness, in the esteem and the practice of all propriety."⁶⁷

And only then when he reaches its greatest height and brilliance "to perfect virtue" does he becomes a *Sheng Jen*.

Conclusions:

To concretize his moral ideals, Confucius presented to his disciples the model of the *Chun Tzu* as a symbol of virtuous like and upright behavior as a paradigm for all to emulate. He himself in life strived to be known as one

⁶⁵Chung Yung, 30:1-2.

⁶⁶Gabriel, *Op. cit.*, p. 582.

⁶⁷Cf.: Ch'ien Mu: *A New Academic Biography of Chu Hsi*-1, p. 385, as cited by Chang Chi Yun: "Model Types of Men by Confucian Standards" *Chinese Culture*, 24 (1983) p. 9.

through his own blameless and noteworthy behavior. The concept of the *Chun Tzu* is traceable to the ancient feudal system in China. In the Pre-Chin literature, (specifically the *Shih Ching*), the *Chun Tzu* signified the son of the sovereign, a prince. Confucius changed the meaning of the word so that it no longer referred to noble birth but to the qualities of the person.⁶⁸ It evolved to signify the nobility of character rather than that of birth.

From the various citations made in the classics on the *Chun Tzu*, the researcher concludes that this idea exemplifies the moral principles embodied in the Confucian moral doctrines. Rubin further states that, by placing the ideal of the *Chun Tzu* as the center of his teaching, Confucius introduced an entirely new element into the ideological foundations of ancient Chinese life. In essence, Confucius affirmed that real nobility depended not on one's birth but in the moral qualities and culture which a person possesses.⁶⁹ Inevitably one can see the gems of the bureaucratic system of the Civil Service: Whoever was teachable and ambitious for letters could become a scholar and serve his prince (later the Imperial State) as an official, notwithstanding the social position of his family.⁷⁰ Thus the Confucian man is best characterized and represented by the idea of the *Chun Tzu*.

The *Chun Tzu* – the Superior Man brings to the fore the basic tenets of Confucianism as lived in real concrete situations in ordinary life. The *Chun Tzu* as an ideal of moral life as conceived in the mind of Confucius should always be the constant concern of every man. It emphasizes on the essential principles of Confucian thought with regards to its ethical personality such as the moral principles of *Jen*, *Yi* and *Li* which must be constantly manifested in his actions. That is why, in his day-to-day encounter with life, the *Chun Tzu* exudes the warmth of humanity.

We have mentioned that this *Chun Tzu* is the personification of the Confucian *Wang Tao* – or the Kingly Way. Strangely we may not have explicitly discussed it as it may have been expected. The *Wang Tao* is in fact the Way of the *Chun Tzu* as it is implied towards the attainment of the perfect state of the *Sheng Jen*. Thus the *Wang Tao* can be considered as the thread that runs through and connects this whole system of moral cultivation. We therefore say that the *Wang Tao* is simply the way of humanity. Perfection in the mind of Confucius is the constant actualization of man's inherent and inexhaustible gifts which is manifested within the confines of righteousness (*Yi*) and propriety (*Li*). The veritable foundation which ebbs all this goodness is the *Jen* in each and every man.

The state of the *Chun Tzu* begins with the realization of the "*Chun Tzu*"-ness in man and the definite decision to tread the path of the *Wang Tao*. This process of realization and decision is brought about through the process of

⁶⁸Vitalii Aronovich Rubin, *Individual and State in Ancient China*, (New York: 1976), p. 20.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁷⁰Joseph Needham: *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge: 1956) vol. 1, p. 86.

education. Education in the Confucian system is not the mere process of gathering and possessing the essences of the things but also the polishing of customs and mores – the cultivation of righteous action, the rational subservience of the affections.

Despite the many descriptions of the *Chun Tzu*, as we have seen in the *Lun Yu*, the essence of this moral ideal invites no theoretical characterization for it is known only to those who struggle from within themselves to follow the Tao and be a *Chun Tzu*. In fact it must be noted that in the Confucian system the emphasis is not of the speculative discussion of the moral principles found in the *Chun Tzu* but more of an exhortation of its practice in non-concrete situations. This exhortation takes the form of a constant and varied appeal for real greatness, desirability, nobility of character as personified in the *Chun Tzu*.

The call to be a *Chun Tzu* is as universal as that of Humanity, for every man without exception must become a *Chun Tzu*. The state of the *Chun Tzu*, its constant struggle within man towards its total conquest is the whole goal of man's inherent nature. This nature is not to be taken as mere essence to be contemplated on but as a surge within oneself to aspire for the best – perfection.

***Chun Tzu* and the Chinese Psyche**

The *Chun Tzu* best exemplifies the essence of the Chinese Psyche. It reflects with great clarity the most profound aspirations of a people conscious of their humanity and its realization.

The *Chun Tzu's* influence in the character of the Chinese people could not be quantitatively assessed. But one thing is most certain, the moral criteria laid down by this classic model has become the measure of virtuous action for centuries in such a way that it has become the symbol of the Chinese soul.

The *Chun Tzu* emanates a strong sense of "socialism" inherent among all Chinese. An individual is seen not as a single entity but as part of the macrocosm of the whole system within which he lives. The *Chun Tzu* is likened to a gem encrusted in a beautiful jewelrystetting – its brilliance and depth is more pronounced when it is taken in relation with the environ. That is why in the appraisal of a *Chun Tzu*, he must be perceived in the context of the society where his ethical principles will not only be honed to the fullest but also be manifested in the highest degree.

Though the social context of the *Chun Tzu* is very much evident, we too must not overlook the role of the individual in the quest for the attainment of this ideal. The individual – the acting moral agent – is in fact the centrality of the whole philosophy behind the concept of the *Chun Tzu*. This "individualism" must never be interpreted as the same as that of the West. The Eastern (nay, the Chinese) concept of the individual is understood as that self as the source of virtue and vice, the option, when taken into the panorama of society

becomes the deciding factor in the success or the failure of this society. That is why in the assessment of the *Chun Tzu* this dual perspective must always be taken into consideration.

When this is understood, the ethnical traits of the Chinese such as clannishness, ritualism, traditionalism and the like which are most often under strong criticism would be more appreciated by the people from the West.

***Chu Tzu* and the 21st century man.**

We must not see the *Chun Tzu* only as part of the rich historical and philosophical tradition of the past but to make this model real even in this present era of great technological and scientific advancement. For if we did so, our studies would just be a mere futile search into the past without any impact for us today.

Since the man in the time of Confucius and the man of this century are essentially the same, the call to attain this state can be presented to all of us. The *Chun Tzu* in the midst of the moral decay and turbulence during the trying eras of Chinese history could likewise fare well if this presence would be felt amidst and many problems faced by man today.

The model of the *Chun Tzu* draws out the sense of self-respect, deep sense of conviction and credibility which seem to be wanting these days.

We are not here to present ready-made solutions to our problems but perhaps we have at least to have an inkling as to how we could proceed towards meaningful resolution. But the truth of the matter is that the answers to our dilemma is within ourselves. We cannot renew and invigorate our society without reviewing our own selves. We must realize that without starting with our personal renewal and the reform, it is impossible for us to change the whole society. If each and everyone would realize this fact and cultivate himself to the full as a *Chun Tzu* then the society in which we live would be a society of *Chun Tzus*. This affirms Confucius' belief that every great step begins with a single step, every social reform begins with self-reform. □