

*Jwāngdǔ+

Against Confucian Meddling (JZ 12:9a)
(c0263)

The great enemy of the Jwāngdǔ writers is the interference of the state, in its standardizing Legalist/Confucian form, with the natural life of men and animals. This piece criticizes the mind that looks always for profit, and the damage that this causes to an unspoiled way of life.

Dǔ-gùng had traveled south to Chǔ, and on his way back to Jīn, he passed by Hàn-yīn. There he saw a man who was about to water his acres. He made an opening and entered his well; holding a pot, he came out and sprinkled. With all that, the effort he expended was very great, and the visible result little. Dǔ-gùng said, “There is a device for this. In one day you can irrigate a hundred acres. The effort expended is very small, and the visible result is great. Would not Your Honor like to have one?” The farmer raised his head and looked at him. He said, “How does it work?” Dǔ-gùng said, It is made of wood. It is heavy in back and light in front. It scoops up much water, as in a continuous flow. It is called the well-sweep.”

The farmer frowned, then laughed. “I heard from my teacher: where there are devices there are device undertakings; where there are there device undertakings, there will be a device mentality. Where is a device mentality within, purity cannot be kept intact; when purity is not intact, the living spirit cannot be retained; when the living spirit is not retained, the Way cannot abide. It is not that I did not know of it; I would be ashamed to use it.”

Dǔ-gùng was completely taken aback; he looked down and did not reply. After a while, the farmer said, “What are you?” Dǔ-gùng said, “I am a follower of Kǔng Chyōu.” The farmer said, “Are you not one of those who reads a lot to imitate the sages, and so despises the many; who plucks his string and sings his laments to sell his fame in the world? You are on the point of forgetting your life spirit, discarding your bodily shape, You are almost there. If your own body you cannot keep in order, what leisure have you to try to keep the world in order? Go away; don’t interfere with my work.”

Dǔ-gùng was astonished and changed countenance; he was confused and did not know what to do. He went on for thirty miles, and only then did he recover his composure . . .

The Madman of Chǔ (JZ 4:7)

The stories in Jwāngdǔ 4 are mostly variants of the Useless Tree theme; hiding out from the dangers of office. This puts them in tacit opposition to the Confucian tradition of dedication to public service. To acknowledge the claims of others, even if there is danger in responding to them, was the courage of the Confucians. Courage and high-mindedness were a problem for the Jwāngdǔ. How do you ridicule high-mindedness as such? An answer was found at the end of Jwāngdǔ 4, in this piece which lashes out at Confucius, who has not the wit to see that the situation is too far gone for help, that his supposed concern for the public welfare is just more of his stupidity. It has the nerve to allude to LY 15:7 (c0305), which praises Ngwèi minister:

. . . A gentleman indeed was Chyǔ Bwó-yw!
If the state had the Way, he served;
If the state had not the Way,
He rolled it up and hid it in his bosom..

which says that one serve when times are good, and when times are bad, one keeps one's ideals safe, against a time when they will once again be functional.

Confucius went to Chǔ. Jyé-yǔ, the Madman of Chǔ, wandered past his gate, singing:

Phoenix, oh! Phoenix, oh!
 How is your virtue now brought low!
 A future age, you'll never live to see,
 Back to a former age, you cannot go.
 When Under Heaven has the Way,
 The Sage spreads virtue far and wide;
 When Under Heaven lacks the Way,
 The Sage in private doth reside.
 And now, in the world of the present day,
 from punishment he tries to hide. . . .
 Have done, oh! Have done, oh!
 With ruling by Virtue here below . . .

*Analects+

A Confucian Rejoinder (LY 18:6)
(c0272)

To the criticisms in the preceding Jwāngd stories, the Analects itself made a public response, with not one but three passages in LY 18. The first (18:5) took up the Madman, Jyé-yw̄, rewrote Jwāngdž 4:7 (p45), showing that Jyé-yw̄ lacked even the courage to defend his ideas. Then 18:6 took up the primitivist hermits, constructing a suitably coarse pair of them. With their return to the muck and mire of premodern farming, they are shown to have abandoned the world of men, where the problems arise, and where alone they can be solved. How to cross over the crisis was not obvious, but one could at least seek it; could “ask about the ford” The very difficulty of action creates a duty to act.

This rejoinder is the most eloquent statement of the duty of man to other men that was ever penned. It in turn produced responses, among them an acceptance of Confucius as a teacher of how to survive while in office (JZ 4:3, 4:2, and 4:1). The “ask about the ford” phrase was burned forever into the Chinese consciousness. For an allusion to this passage by Táu Chyén, who himself sought a life apart from the troubles of the times, and turned this phrase to his own purpose, see p130.

Tall-in-the-Mud and Bold-in-the-Mire were plowing together. Confucius passed by, and sent Dž-lù to inquire of them about the ford. Tall-in-the-Mud said, Who is that who is driving? Dž-lù said, It is Kǔng Chyōu. He said, Would that be Kǔng Chyōu of Lǔ? He said, It would. He said, Oh, *he* knows the ford.

He inquired of Bold-in-the-Mire. Bold-in-the-Mire said, Who are *you*? He said, Jùng Yóu. He said, Would that be the follower of Kǔng Chyōu of Lǔ? He replied, Yes. He said “A thing overflowing – all the world is such, and who is going to change it? And rather than follow one who withdraws from men, why not follow one who withdraws from the whole age?” And he went on plowing without further pause.

Dž-lù went and told of it. Our Master said consolingly, Birds and beasts cannot be flocked together with. Were I not a follower of men, with whom then should I take part? If the world possessed the Way, Chyōu would not be taking part in trying to change it.

*Jwāngdǔ+

Back to Nature (JZ 20:4)

It should not be thought that abashment was the only response to the Analects critique. On the contrary, other voices took up the challenge that men cannot flock with birds and beasts, and portrayed Confucius himself as doing exactly that. Again we are warned of the danger of the desire for office – the only motive which this group of Jwāngdǔ writers were prepared to acknowledge in the Confucians.

Confucius was surrounded between Chǔn and Tsà; for seven days he had eaten no cooked food. Tà-gūng Rǔn went to condole with him, saying, “Are you going to die?” “Yes.” “Do you dislike dying?” “Yes.” Rǔn said, “Let me try to tell the way not to die.”

“In the Eastern Sea there are birds called Desireless. This is the kind of birds they are: they flap and flutter, seeming incapable. They fly together and roost in a body. Going forward, they dare not be first; returning, they dare not be last. In feeding, they do not taste first, but always take what is left over. Thus in their traveling there is no discord; and outsiders cannot harm them. In this way they avoid trouble.”

“The straight tree is first felled; the sweet well is first exhausted. Your intention is to parade your knowledge to astonish the ignorant; to cultivate yourself to shine among the ordinary; you glitter about as though carrying the sun and moon under your arms, and thus you will not escape. Long ago I heard an Accomplished One say, Who preens himself will have no success; whose goal is realized will fall, whose fame is complete will be disgraced. Who can leave success and fame, and return among the many? Flow with the Way, and not stand out? Abide in Virtue, and not advertise one’s dwelling? Pure, unchanging, but seeming demented, wiping out one’s tracks and diminishing his presence, not acting so as to gain a name for accomplishment – in this way, he will owe nothing to others, and they will owe nothing to him. The Highest Man is not known; why do you so delight in it?”

Confucius said, “Good!” He took leave of his companions, dismissed his disciples, and went off to the Great Swamp. He wore rough clothing and ate simple grains. He went among the beasts, and did not disturb their flocks; he went among the birds, and did not disturb their files. Neither bird nor beast took him ill; how much less should men?