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Whispering Sacredness: The Literati and their Apparatus

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Whispering Sacredness: The Literati and their Apparatus

The Module

By defining ‘literati’ and discussing the relationship between the literati, their apparatus, and their oeuvre, we are examining, in fact, Chinese thought. In Chinese worldview the sacred and secular are not sharply separated, as in the West. The Chinese primary religions are Daoism and Confucianism. Daoism is concerned with the individual’s relationship with Nature. And Confucianism explains man’s bearing on society and hence on the universe. For, it is the action of man, which maintains the harmony in the world.

The Analects of Confucius is the text that presents the ideal man, *junzi*. It is a how to book of instructions to become the ideal Confucius’ human being? The selected paintings are examples of the literati’, *wen ren*, achievements in that domain.

Paintings:ⁱ

Taking a qin to a friend
Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains
Wintry Trees

The Text: *The Analects of Confucius*ⁱⁱ

The Analects of Confucius is simply the guidebook to lead to the Dao.

Confucius (551-479 BC) is counted among the few exemplars; these rare individuals who take it upon themselves, or seem to be called from above and beyond, to reconcile heaven and earth. They come to our planet, and influence the people to live fully and to die in dignity. Those scarce beings we call wise men.

In “*The Analects of Confucius*,” Confucius gives general directions on how to tread the path of life properly and ideally. Confucius is not the author of the work per se, albeit his sayings are offered as generalizations of a charted map and answers to specific questions of his disciples. Confucius was a philosopher indeed and a high priest of the Chinese culture that did not separate the temporal from the sacred. “For the sacred is not transcendently removed from the secular.”

There are several versions on when and how the book, as we have it, was put together-possibly compiled “about 150 BC.” Interestingly, “the last Chinese civil service examination based on the *Analects of Confucius* was administered in the twentieth century, in 1905.”

The word ‘**literati**,’ plural, ‘**literatus**,’ singular, in Chinese is *wen ren*. The Chinese does not allow for a distinction between plural or singular. It means, seemingly, man or men of letters or a scholar(s); a *junzi*, an ideal human being, to be precise, in Confucius thought. But, then again what is an ideal human being, nonetheless a human being at all in the Chinese perception? According to Roger Ames’ discussion of the term *ren*, we are led to

comprehend, the Confucian understanding that “one cannot become a person by oneself.” “For Confucius unless there are at least two human beings, there can be no human beings.” It takes one to know one perhaps? Chinese perception of life is about living, learning, and experiencing! Confucius, the Master said: “The excellent persons, *de*, do not dwell alone; they are sure to have neighbors.” (4.25)

As human beings we manifest an ongoing process. We are continuously becoming, evolving, and unfolding into the ideal being through growth in relationships with one another and with the Dao, through propriety *li* and seeing to one’s duties towards each other and our ancestors, and learning, as in education. This creates harmony and balance and insures euphony with the heavens (*tiandi*, meaning the heavens and earth, for the heavens *tian*, is part of this world and an important entity in the relational composition of this universe. *Tian* is the world. The Master said: “Achieving harmony is the most valuable function of observing propriety. In the ways of the Former Kings, this achievement of harmony made them elegant, and was a guiding standard in all things large and small.” (20.3)

When Confucius was asked: “Are you, sir, a sage? Confucius replied, I cannot claim to be a sage – I only study without respite and instruct others without growing weary... To study without respite is to be wise. To instruct others without growing weary is to be an authoritative person. And in being both authoritative and wise, you sir, are already a sage.” The process of becoming is an ongoing reality. The person does not stop happening even in death, because he is promoted to becoming an ancestor spirit, with higher calling, to intercede with the heaven on the living behalf.

The last message of Confucius in *The Analects of Confucius* is: “Someone who does not understand the propensity of circumstances *ming* has no way of becoming an exemplary person *junzi*; someone who does not understand the observance or ritual propriety *li* has no way of knowing where to stand; a person who does not understand words has no way of knowing others.” (20.3)

The inquiry must begin to define the ideal *wen ren*. For this I will peruse *The Analects of Confucius* searching for the definition within some of the sayings of Confucius. The student should pay special attention to the following selection of sayings chosen from the Analects.

Selections from “*The Analects of Confucius*:”

Book 1

“The Master said: Having studied, to then repeatedly apply what you have learned.” (1.1)
“Exemplary persons concentrate their efforts on the root, for the root having taken hold, the way, Dao, will grow there from. As for filial and fraternal responsibility, it is, I suspect, the root of authoritative conduct *ren*. (1.2)

“The way to lead a thousand Chariot state effectively is to carry out your official duties respectfully and make on your word, *xin*; be frugal in your expenditures and love your peers; and put the common people to work only at the proper time of year.” (1.5)

“Exemplary persons lacking gravity would have no dignity. Yet in their studies they are not inflexible. Take doing your utmost and making good on your word as your mainstay. So not have as a friend anyone who is not as good as you are. And where you have erred, do not hesitate to mend your ways.” (1.8)

Book 2

“From fifteen, my heart and mind was set upon learning; from thirty I took my stance; from forty I was no longer doubtful; from fifty I realized the propensities of *tian*; from sixty my ear was attuned; from seventy I could give my heart-and-mind free rein without overstepping the boundaries.” (2:4)

“Reviewing the old as a means of realizing the new-such a person can be considered a teacher.”(2.11)

“*junzi* are not mere vessels.” (2:12)

“They first accomplish what they are going to say, and only then say it.” (2:13)

Book 3

“Exemplary persons are not competitive, except where they have to be in the archery ceremony. Greeting and making way for each other, the archers ascend the hall, and returning they drink a salute. Even in contesting, they are exemplary persons.” (3:7)

Book 4

“*junzi* cherish their excellence; petty persons cherish their land. Exemplary persons cherish fairness; petty persons cherish the thought of gain.” (4:11)

“The Master said: Do not worry over not having an official position; worry about what it takes to have one. Do not worry that no one acknowledges you; seek to do what will earn you acknowledgment.” (4.14)

“*junzi* understand what is appropriate *yi*.” (4.16)

“*junzi* wants to be slow to speak yet quick to act.” (4.24)

Book 6

“Exemplary persons, *junzi* learn broadly of culture, *wen*, discipline this learning through observing ritual propriety, *li*, and moreover, in so doing can remain on course without straying from it.” (6.27)

Book 7

“Set your sights on the way, Dao, sustain yourself with excellence, *de* learns upon authoritative conduct, *ren*, and sojourn in the arts.” (7.6)

“I do not open the way for students who are not driven with eagerness; I do not supply a vocabulary for students who are not trying desperately to find the language for their ideas. If on showing students one corner they do not come back to me with the other three, I will not repeat myself.” (7.8)

“The master taught under four categories: culture, *wen*, proper conduct, *xing*, doing one’s utmost, *zhong*, and making good on one’s word, *xin*.” (7.25)

“The exemplary person is calm and unperturbed; the petty person is always agitated and anxious.” (7.37)

Book 8

“The master said, deference unmediated by observing ritual propriety, *li* is lethargy; caution unmediated by observing ritual propriety is timidity; boldness unmediated by observing ritual propriety is rowdiness; candor unmediated by observing ritual propriety is rudeness. Where exemplary persons are earnestly committed to their parents, the people will aspire to authoritative conduct, *ren*; where they do not neglect their old friends, the people will not be indifferent to each other.” (8.2)

“The Master said, it is not easy to find students who will not study for three years without their thoughts turning to an official salary.” (8.12)

“The Master said, make an earnest commitment to the love of learning, *haoxue* and be steadfast to the death in service to the efficacious way, *shandao*. Do not enter a state in crisis, and do not tarry in one that is in revolt. Be known when the way prevails in the world, but remain hidden away when it does not. It is a disgrace to remain poor and without rank when the way prevails in the state; it is a disgrace to be wealthy and of noble rank when it does not.” (8.13)

Book 9

“There were four things the Master abstained from entirely; he did not speculate, he did not claim or demand certainty, he was not inflexible, and he was not self-absorbed.” (9.4)

“The Master said, how could one but comply with what model sayings have to say? But the real value lies in drawing out its meaning. What can possibly be done with people who find pleasure in polite language but do not draw out its meaning, or who comply with model sayings but do not reform their ways.” (9.24)

“The wise, *zhi* are not in a quandary; the authoritative, *ren* are not anxious; the courageous are not timid.” (9.29)

“You can study with some, and yet not necessarily walk the same path, Dao; you can walk the same path as some, and yet not necessarily take your stand with them; you can take your stand with them, and yet not necessarily weigh things up in the same way.” (9.30)

Book 12

“The Master said: Learn broadly of culture, *wen*, discipline this learning through observing ritual propriety, *li*, and moreover, in so doing, remain on course without straying from it.” (12.15)

“The exemplary person, *junzi* attracts friends through refinement, *wen*, and thereby promotes authoritative conduct, *ren*.” (12.24)

Book 13

“About governing: Set an example yourself and then urge the people on. Be unflagging in your efforts.” (13.1)

“If people are proper, *zheng* in personal conduct, others will follow suit without need of command. But if they are not proper, even when they command, others will not obey.” (13.6)

“What must one be like to be called a scholar-apprentice, *shi*? The Master replied, those who conduct themselves with a sense of shame and who, when sent to distant quarters, do not disgrace the commission of their lord, deserve to be called a scholar-apprentice.” (13.20)

“Exemplary persons are distinguished but not arrogant.” (13.26)

“Being firm, resolute, honest and deliberate in speech is close to authoritative conduct, *ren*.” (13.27)

“Persons who are critical and demanding yet amicable can be called scholar-apprentices. They need to be critical and demanding with their friends, and amicable with brothers.” (13.28)

Book 14

“The Master said, the path, Dao of the exemplary person has three conditions, the authoritative, *ren* are not anxious; the wise, *zhi* are not in quandary; the courageous are not timid.” (14.28)

Book 15

“The Master said, having a sense of appropriate conduct, *yi* as one’s basic disposition, *zhi*, developing it in observing ritual propriety, *li*, expressing it with modesty and consummating it in making good on one’s word, *xin*: this is an exemplary person, *junzi*.” (15.18)

“Exemplary persons are distressed by their lack of ability, not by the failure of others to acknowledge them.” (15.19)

“Exemplary persons despise the thought of ending their days without having established a name.” (15.20)

“Exemplary persons make their plans around the way, Dao and not around sustenance. Tilling the land often leads to hunger as a matter of course; studying often leads to an official salary as a matter of course. Exemplary persons are anxious about the way, and not about poverty.” (15.32)

“In serving your lord, compensation comes second to full attention to one’s duties.” (15.38)

“In instruction, there is no such thing as social classes.” (15.39)

Book 16

“Exemplary persons, *junzi* have three kinds of conduct that they guard against: when young and vigorous, they guard against licentiousness; in their prime when their vigor is at its height, they guard against conflict; in their old age when their vigor is declining, they guard against acquisitiveness.” (16.7)

“Exemplary persons hold three things in awe: the propensities of *tian*, persons in high station, and the words of the sages.” (16.8)

“Knowledge, *zhi* acquired through a natural propensity for it is its highest level, knowledge acquired through study is the next highest; something learned in response to difficulties encountered is again the next highest. But those among the common people who do not learn even when vexed with difficulties – they are at the bottom of the heap.” (16.9)

Book 17

On authoritative conduct, *ren*: “A person who is able to carry into practice five attitudes in the world can be considered authoritative: deference, tolerance, making good on one’s word, diligence, and generosity. If you are deferential, you will not suffer insults; if tolerant, you will win over the many; if you make good on your word, others will rely upon you; if diligent, you will get results; if generous, you will have the status to employ others effectively.” (17.6)

“The flaw in being fond of acting authoritatively, *ren* without equal regard for learning is that you will be easily duped, the flaw in being fond of acting wisely, *zhi* without equal regard for learning is that it leads to self-indulgence; the flaw in being fond of making good on one’s word, *xin* without equal regard for learning is that it leads one into harm’s way; the flaw in being fond of candor without equal regard for learning is that it leads to unruliness; the flaw in being fond of firmness without equal regard for learning is that it leads to rashness.” (17.8)

Following is an analysis of qualities of the *junzi*, *wen ren*, the literati have to embody in few words:

The qualities quoted in the above listing, and hence acquired by the *junzi* are embedded in his personality. Thus the ideal person attracts good people. The ideal person does not dwell alone. He/she studies continuously and shares knowledge without tiring. Becoming authoritative and wise is a continuous strife. To be humble and keeping one’s word is always expected. Maintaining filial, fraternal, and official responsibilities is the norm.

To be frugal, esteem your peers, and be just toward the common people are anticipated qualities. Maintaining one’s dignity, and remaining grounded, choosing one’s friends wisely, admitting one’s errors and correcting oneself are foreseen.

The ideal person remains calm and undisturbed. Do not procrastinate. Observing propriety is the guide. Because it is observing propriety, *li* that keeps a person in line. Seek Discipline through *li*. Become refined and do not stray from the path, Dao. Remain

distinguished but never arrogant. Do not speculate, be flexible, do not be self-absorbed, do not be anxious, do not be timid.

In colloquial terminology: talk the talk and walk the walk.

Dear scholar to be: Cherish your superiority by excelling in your quest of the arts. Become the teacher of: how to learn.

Traditionally the literatus, thus modeled perfection in his every day life, and achieved cultural success by attaining social status. He/she is a product of years of study the classic texts, history, and philosophy, while securing an official position in the government.

Wen ren, the literatus, is the ultimate of what a human being can become. For, he is an aesthetic project in progress. Confucius said: “ Exemplary persons always keep nine things in mind; in looking they think about clarity, in hearing they think about acuity, in countenance they think about cordiality, in bearing and attitude they think about deference, in speaking they think about doing their utmost, *zhong*, in conducting affairs they think about due respect, in entertaining doubts they think about the proper questions to ask, in anger they think about regret, in sight of gain they think about appropriate conduct, *yi*.” (16.10)

The Analects of Confucius serves as the measure of the man!

This is the model of the literatus, a cultured person in progress. But their formation did not end there in having a great personality, thus conducting themselves with the outmost decorum and learning the Classics. They also had to excel at writing, calligraphy, and calligraphic painting. These arts were connected with the political as well as the religious life of China.

Writingⁱⁱⁱ

“The vehicle of administration was, the written language, in which directives were conveyed and reports made... a written language which was accessible to all generations and not tied to a particular pronunciation system, and which thus did not become outdated as spoken language changed, meant that all past decisions and practices could be studied by all generations of officials. China early developed systems of compiling documents and indexing them so that they could be readily used.”

The Chinese written language was mostly made up of pictograms and ideograms. It has to be noted, celebrated, and appreciated that “political upheavals only rarely affected this body of knowledge; they merely intensified the sense that in the past things had been managed ‘ successfully and that “a full consideration of past examples would help solve present difficulties.

Painting and writing^{iv} were thought together as one. Painting and writing though they have different names are one. They are “regarded as having the same kind of magic

efficacy. To know the name of a thing is to have power over the thing: to be able to write the name of a thing gives even more power over it, and to make a picture of it is as efficacious as writing its name. Painting may also have cosmic significance because of its powerful and ennobling influence on human character and behavior, which in traditional Chinese thinking, exercises a direct influence upon the phenomena of Nature.”

Writing and painting were venerated and loved. Writing and painting used the same tools. And because of that, the tools of writing and painting found similar admiration and attained symbolic significance as writing and painting. The apparatus of writing and painting became to be known as: “the four treasures; brush, *bi*, ink stone, *yan*, ink, *mo*, and paper.”^v

The apparatus of the literati were considered art objects worthy of admiration and contemplation. Aren't they after all conspirators in the production of writing and painting? Through writing and painting the literati were able to produce the beautiful calligraphic characters and the awesome scenes of nature? These tools were the vehicles of the literati's creativity.

Therefore one is not surprised that the implements of the literati were elaborate. They were made of special stones and materials, which were used in making ritual objects. They were often adorned with carving, painting, or even sculpting. They were rich in symbols and religious meanings. No wonder then that the only way the literatus approached his desk was in reverence.

The writing brush was thought to be an extension of the inner strength of the literatus transmitted through the brush itself. And hence the literatus character was evaluated through the brush stroke itself. Since the elements used to critique the work of art were used to critique the artist himself, according to Acker.

William Reynolds Beal Acker, author of *Some T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting*, writes about Hsieh Ho (Xie He) author of *The KuHua P'in Lu (Old Record of the Classification of Painters)*, who was a painter and a portraitist in the late fifth century in China. This work includes the first known work with critical evaluations of painters. (Acker p.x)The aesthetic ideals of the elements as referred to by Xie He, by which to critique Chinese paintings are cited below:

The six elements of painting:^{vi}

“Painting has six elements. Those elements are used to critique Chinese paintings. The first is called spirit resonance or life movement, *qi yun shen dong*. The second is called bone method or the use of the brush, *gu fa yong bi*. The third is called correspondence to the thing or the depicting of forms, *ying wu xiang*. The fourth is called correspondence to type or the laying on of colors, *sui lei fu cai*. The fifth is called division and planning or placing and arrangement, *jing ying wei zhi*. The sixth is called transmitting models, or reproducing and copying from ancient times, *chuan yi mo xie*.”

Acker emphasizes that those elements should be found in the literatus, the scholar-painter before he undertakes the work of art. And I add, that for the literatus, *wen ren* is the ultimate of what a human being can become and he/she is actually an aesthetic project in progress. So, according to Acker:

“1. The painter had spirit – resonance. That is, he knew how to nourish and control his *qi*, (creative energy), so that when painting he was vibrant with life. Therefore the painting bears witness that he had that ability, or indeed some of his *qi* remained in it, making and keeping it alive.

2. The painter had *ku fa*, (bone method). He knew how to draw a vigorous firm line. Therefore the painting also has *ku fa*.

3. The painter could *ying wu*, (reflect the object) therefore his work vividly recalls the thing painted.

4. The painter had the power of *sui lei*, the painter should know how to suit his technique and approach the subject to be painted and give it its own appropriate treatment.

5. The painter knew how to *ching ying*, (lay out and plan his work to the best advantage). And of course his work is going to reflect his knowledge.

6. The painter should have acquired the ability to make copies of famous master-pieces and this would be obvious in the mastery his work reflects.”

Before going any further, it is essential to stress, that the literatus and the painting are similar or even the same entity. At least to be recognized as both the vehicle in rendering the artwork: The maker and the thing, hence they are equally judged by the same criteria.

The elements of painting implicate and express simply the Chinese Principle, which demands veneration rather than worship; which is neither ‘sacred’ nor ‘secular’ as understood in the Western thought. It is propriety, *li*, on which the universe operates. The creation is constantly created and evolving. It is a religion that begs for a nomenclature. It is the whispered sacredness. It is the whispered sacredness that the literati produced on the paper in his brush stroke that held and inscribed that which is dictated by the Chinese Classics and embodied in the ritual. Shall we label the Chinese thought ‘secusacred?’ (Note: Proposition of the author of this paper, using secular and sacred combined).

For the Chinese Worldview, the sacred and the secular are not defined or demarcated, they are taken together, since all things are equally purposed to sustain the balance of the universe, as clearly found in the concept of the ‘yin yang’. Also it appears that the Chinese Worldview does not recognize the sacred and the secular as separate entities.

Few examples of the material used to make the apparatus of the literati indicate the painstaking in valuing and producing them. Jade for instance was used to make the esteemed art tools. Since, jade is the most precious of all stones in China. “It was believed to have been forged from a rainbow to make thunderbolts for the storm gods. Jade is thus endowed with five virtues: clarity, in the stone’s luster, bright but warm; rectitude, found in its translucency, revealing color and inner markings; wisdom, in the purity and penetrating quality of its note when struck; courage, in that the stone can be broken, but not bent; and equity, in that its sharp edges injure no one.”^{vii} “Jade is, from a

latent perspective, a power stone. To own jade, a divine stone, was to have protection against evil spirits. It was also a stone representative of success, royalty, and sophistication, in Confucian ideology.”

Also amber is very special for Chinese carving because, “it is a form of fossilized pine resin and is found naturally in a variety of colors, but honey and cherry are the most common. Amber, or bupo in Chinese, means ‘soul of the tiger.’ Mythically, when a tiger died, its soul became part of the earth and was transformed into amber. Amber thus symbolizes courage, the tiger’s essence.” Amber is used to make brush washers for instance or brush rest.”

Writing brushes were usually made of bamboo. “Bamboo was highly prized a s symbol of the dignity and humanity of the scholar. The Chinese word for bamboo is *zhu*, rhyming with *zu*, the spoken word for sufficient wealth or abundance to live with peace of mind. So bamboo was thought to be the key to having a secure life.”

The literati work is a form of ritual

The literati work was already charged from the apparatus and their symbols, the six elements of the art and the artist critique, of the universal harmony that was resting on their shoulders, to their own creative force...Not mentioning the beholder...Therefore writing and painting become forms of ritual by necessity in this interpretation. And each brushstroke touching the surface of the silk or each drop of paint or ink absorbed in the paper expresses the Chinese tradition, the Chinese principle, (should I go on?)

Surely the Chinese principle is about the experience and not about the doctrine. It is lived rather than sought! That is why the only way writing and painting can be looked at or actually thought about and understood is as a form of a ritual. And the ritual starts with the literatus, oneself and his approaching his desk in reverence and contemplation of his apparatus lovingly, longingly, and above all respectfully!

The Chinese scholars had the rules and the tools. They became the literati and their apparatus. Watching a literatus in action is like observing a priest at an altar. Acker writes about an experience he had viewing a renowned scholar at work in 1930s in China:

“I had the unusual pleasure of watching him (a distinguished calligrapher) write large characters. He stood, feet planted firmly like a fencer, before a large table, on the other side stood a servant who leaned across it grasping the top of a large sheet of paper. As (he) wrote, humming to himself and moving the big brush about for all the world like a fencer his foil, the servant kept pulling the paper towards him, so that (the calligrapher) did not have to change his position. The brush he used was a large one, about four inches thick where the hairs were tied and entered the wooden handle, and I noticed that after plunging it into the ink he would dig his fingers in among the hairs of the brush instead of keeping them on the handle. I asked him why he did so, pointing out that after all it meant that he could never get his hands, quite clean, since he was in the habit of writing large characters every day, and he replied that in so doing the *ch’i* (*qi*) flowed down his arm,

and through his fingertips directly into the ink itself, and thence onto the paper, where some of it would remain, animating the characters, even after the ink had dried.”^{viii}

It is clear then that the scholar, the apparatus, and the *qi*, life spirit or vital energy, become one unit in the creative process. According to Acker, the Chinese believe that the vital energy is something concrete. It can be nourished, cultivated, and stored up for use when needed or required. The vital energy is thought to be “something malleable, which can be brought under conscious control and made to flow into, and accumulate in any desired region of the body.”

Qi

The working of the vital energy had inspired poets and here is a poem describing *qi* as a pool that should never be allowed to run dry:

“Never till that pool runs dry shall the four limbs fail;
Nor till the well is exhausted shall the traffic of the
Nine Apertures cease.
Thereby (accumulation of *qi* shall you be enabled to explore
Heaven and Earth,
Reach the Four Oceans that bound the world,
Within, have no thoughts that perplex,
Without, suffer no evil or calamity.
Inside, the mind shall be whole,
Whole too the bodily frame.”

Thus creativity, in the Chinese thought, is an ongoing happening, the *qi* that flows from the inside of the artist into his arm transmitted into the brush is eternalized on the paper or silk whispering to the beholder of the work of art, whom in turn, the beholder, is called upon to participate in the process of the creativity phenomena, and as such in contemplating the work of art it activates the whispers leaving the tableau coming out straight to the beholder with some of that precious *qi* exacting the balance of the whole process.

It should be noted that Chinese art of calligraphy and landscape painting is seasonal that is, it is not on display year around. It is displayed only if the occasion calls for it. This important fact enhances our understanding of the purpose of Chinese art. It is part of the ritual. Nature is always evolving, renewed, created, mysterious, clear, always touchable, however elusive – the artist scholar, the Literatus, is the administrator of the sacrament of the affirmation of the continuous renewal and transfer of the *qi* from nature to himself to the beholder. This continuous renewal caused by the participation of the beholder (if also a *junzi*) results in freshness seen in the work of art.

Perhaps Hans-Georg Gadamer, the German philosopher is best at describing this process of viewing art, as it is perceived in the Chinese thought as “The aesthetic of religion of culture”^{ix} Consequently when the beholder views the work of art he himself undergoes a

process of affirmation and the work of art is also renewed, in the sense that it is always valid and it survives the aging of time!

Look at early Chinese paintings:

Have you ever noticed that if there is a person in a Chinese nature scene is usually small in dimension compared to the majestic mountains, the tall trees, and the vast surface of mist or water. However, this is what grasps our attention and this is what we focus upon. It seems that the person maintains the balance of the work of art. And I believe this is what Confucius meant when he described the ultimate noble person, *junzi*. If the work of art does not show a *junzi*; the beholder, preferably a *junzi*, so he can give and receive *qi* Whispering sacredness... Thus the literati and their apparatus perform the ritual perfectly allowing the beholder to participate to complete “the aesthetic of the religion of the culture.” The culture endures.

And thus the literatus can ably murmur to his creation, his calligraphy or painting, using his brush, the sacredness he has attained from knowing the Dao; and applying himself according to the Classics; and preparing his whole being in the fashion Confucius described in *The Analects of Confucius*. Very few people were able to attain this high level of achievement.

The true and authentic literati calligrapher-painters are called scholars-amateur according to James Cahill, meaning they were not paid for their art works. Confucius said pondering and lamenting the fact that “It is not easy to find students who will study for three years without their thoughts turning to an official salary.”(*The Analects of Confucius* 8.12) People committed to the ideal are rare indeed. They are the epitome of Confucius, the ideal of existence!

Contemplate the following Paintings considered fine examples of the literati work:

“Taking a qin to a friend:” ^x Hanging scroll, ink and slight color on silk, dated c. 1500. By Jiang Song or Xu Daoning.

“The artist’s signature and seal have been removed from the top left-hand corner of the painting.” The claim is Jiang Song is the probable painter based on the style.

A word about the *qin*, zither, Chinese lute: it was considered an elite musical instrument of the literati. “The *qin* was thought of as the constant companion of the gentleman,” and it was not meant for public performance.

“It is often seen in the hands of sage figures in Chinese landscape paintings. This representation emphasizes the tranquility that *qin* practice brought the player. Its deep and quiet voice, resonating with the inner self, induced a feeling of harmony between the self and the outside world. Ideal *qin* music bordered on the inaudible, and it could induce in the player a meditative state”^{xi}

The Chinese artists had rules about when and where one could play the *qin* even had rules about prohibiting playing the *qin* which dictate ritual observation, such as “not washing one’s hands and rinsing one’s mouth... They had fourteen such rules for don’ts’ and fourteen rules for dos.”^{xii}

For the love of the *qin* the artists composed poetry to sing its beauty and importance.

“*Dwelling in the Fuchan Mountains:*”^{xiii} Handscroll ink on paper, dated 1350. By Huang Gonwang

This work is counted among the most important examples that the literati had to study in order to maintain the amateur literati style of painting that reflects sophistication and refinement.

“*Wintry Trees:*” Hanging scroll, ink on paper, dated 1543. By Wen Zhengming

Wen Zhengming is the leading amateur literati of the 16th century. About his work he claimed that he was inspired by Li Cheng a landscape painter of the 10th century. This fits the sixth element of painting, of studying old masters.

In conclusion, the literati, the scholars-amateur, their apparatus, and their creation of calligraphy and painting make one. They are inseparable. We can hear their whispering sacredness and the ideal of existence every time we contemplate their brush strokes. Every time we admire their calligraphy or painting we are exchanging the vital energy with them and their oeuvre.

Should we dare to call the literati, *wen ren*, “the priests of Chinese art?” I wonder! Confucius might not approve!!! But then again why not!!!

Endnotes

- ⁱ Jessica Rawson, editor, *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc, 1993) 117, 116, 117.
- ⁱⁱ Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 17, 9,10, 48, 5,47, 242.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Jessica Rawson, editor, *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc, 1993) 21.
- ^{iv} William Beal Acker, *Some T'ang and Pre T'ang Texts on Chinese Paintings* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1954), 61.
- ^v Pauline Cherrett, *Chinese Brush Painting* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co. Inc., 2005) 10.
- ^{vi} William Beal Acker, *Some T'ang and Pre T'ang Texts on Chinese Paintings* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1954), 148,lii, xiii. Notes to page 9.
- ^{vii} Daryl S. Paulson, "A study In Chinese Scholar Objects," *Oriental Art*, 2005, No. 2: 39, 40, 41. Notes to page 10.
- ^{viii} William Beal Acker, *Some T'ang and Pre T'ang Texts on Chinese Paintings* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1954), xxx, xxxi, xxxi. Notes to page 11.
- ^{ix} Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London:Continuum, 2006), 68. Notes to page 12.
- ^x Jessica Rawson, editor, *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc, 1993) 117, 341.
- ^{xi} Kenneth J. DeWoskin, *A Song for One or two: Music and the Concept of Art in Early China*. (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies; the University of Michigan. Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies, no. 42)
- ^{xii} R.H. Van. Gulik, *The Lore of the Chinese Lute: An Essay in the Ideology of the Ch'n*. (New ed. Tokyo: Sophia University.
- ^{xiii} Jessica Rawson, editor, *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc, 1993) 116,117 118.

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Further Paintings to look at

"Seeking the Tao in the the Autumn Mountains." (Mary Tregear p.110) Hanging scroll, ink and slight color on silk, dated c. 960-980. By Zhu Ran.

“Traveling in Streams and Mountains.” (Mary Tregear p.111) Hanging scroll, ink and slight color on silk, dated c.950- 1050. By Fan Kuan.

“Fishing in a Mountain Stream (detail).” (Mary Tregear p. 114). Handscroll, ink on silk, dated 11th century. By Xu Daoning.

“Autumn Colors on the Qiao and Hua Mountains (detail).” (Mary Tregear p.96) Handscroll, ink and light color on paper, dated 1295. By Zhao Mengfu.

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