

節 (JIE)

人之有節 猶竹之有節也
竹有節 故能勁立 人有節 故能堅剛

Mankind has JIE (Strength of Character, Temperance) as bamboo has its nodes (node is the same word as JIE in Chinese).

Because it has JIE, the bamboo can therefore hold its stem high. By virtue of having JIE, mankind consequently can be strong-minded.

古來忠臣義士 孝子烈婦 皆本節字而成

In ancient times, the attainments of loyal imperial officials, righteous citizens, dutiful children and upright widows were all fundamentally achieved using JIE.

良以節乃天地正氣之所鍾 故雖臨白刃 蹈湯火 而有不折不撓之概也

Since JIE concentrates all the righteous spirit of Heaven and Earth, people of JIE are full of mettle and perseverance even though they be confronted with sword or fire.

文天祥曰 時窮節乃見

Wen Tian-Xiang¹ said, "Turbulent times manifest people's JIE."

Note¹: Wen has been noted in the Chapter 7 "YI".

蓋窮者 眾人之所不幸 而君子之所大幸也

Basically, turbulent times are unfortunate for everyone, yet they are, in a way, fortunate to honorable people.

何也 不遇疾風 無以知勁草 不逢亂世 無以識忠臣

The reason is: without facing strong wind, the strongest blade of grass remains undiscovered; without living in the times of chaos, the loyal imperial official goes unrecognized.

故君子以處危亂 而節愈顯

Thus, in a crisis, honorable person's JIE is distinctively revealed.

雖然 節 固君子之所願 亦非君子之所願也

Moreover, JIE, to which honorable people aspire, is also ironically a characteristic that they reluctantly accept.

舉世皆狂瀾矣 煉石補天 將出誰手 故曰君子之所願也

When the whole world is in a desperate situation, who lends a hand to stem the raging tide? The honorable people! Thus, honorable people yearn for JIE.

然與為由之勇 賜之辯 不若為回之太和安逸 而勇辯無所施之為愈也

However, being as brave and forceful as Yau¹ or as persuasive as Tsi², is less excellent than Wui's³ vision for world peace and well-being of life.

Indeed, conditions presenting no cause requiring bravery or diplomacy are best of all.

Note¹: Yau (由 即仲由 字子路 好勇), a student of Confucius, was enamored of force and wished to use power to pacify the world.

Note²: Tsi (賜 即端木賜 字子貢 好辯), a student of Confucius, favored the art of persuasion and wished to use diplomatic skill to pacify the world.

Note³: Wui (回 即顏回 字子淵 安貧樂道), a student of Confucius, held high the ideal of life itself, even in less than perfect conditions, and opposed the theories of Yau and Tsi, promoting better government instead.

故曰 節者非君子之所願也 君子之不得已也

Thus, some have said that honorable people do not actually yearn for JIE, but they have no alternative when circumstances are forced upon them.

人於不得已之際 而死生不改其守 非天植之性 其孰能之

When people face no alternative, they still do their duty which may cost them their lives. But if not because of this heavenly endowed characteristic, what else can underlie their steadfastness?

故丹可磨而不可奪其色 蘭可燻而不可滅其香

玉可碎而不可污其白 金可消而不可改其剛

Consider these things: a medical pill can be ground up but its color doesn't vanish; an orchid can be dried up but its fragrance can't be suppressed; jade can be broken but its purity can't be sullied; gold can be burned but its strength can't be diminished.

各抱天然之性 非可強變者也

士君子之抱德不移 亦猶是耳

Everything has its own natural essence which cannot be altered by force.

The same characteristic applies to honorable people when they embrace virtue and never waver.

昔者趙文子 其中若不勝衣 其言若不出口
及宋之盟 談笑當甲兵之變 神閒氣定而不辭

Long ago, there lived Chui Man-Dzi whose body was described as more delicate than his clothes and whose words always found difficulty to come out from his mouth.

However, at the Unification meeting of countries held in the city of Song¹, he, overcoming his handicaps, talked and laughed amid the hostile armed throng. He was confident, composed and never showed sign of wavering.

Note¹: Chui lived in the "Spring and Autumn Period" (BC 770-476) and was an imperial official of the Country of Jin. At one time, the Countries of Jin and Tsoi tried to unite and held a meeting in the city of Song. However, Tsoi had no intention of unity but had planned this meeting as an opportunity to kidnap all the representatives of Jin. Chui calmly stood up for his country in the midst of the tension and tumult of the meeting, and because of this, the kidnap scheme was aborted.

晏子長不滿六尺 及崔慶之盟 鉤以曲戟而不避

Scholar Yan stood less than six feet¹ tall. When he was meeting with Tsoey and Hing², a hook was placed around his neck and a sword held to his chest; but he did not waver.

Note¹: It is an ancient Chinese six feet which is about five feet in nowadays measurement.

Note²: Scholar Yan was an imperial administrator of Country of Qi(齊) in the "Spring and Autumn Period". At one time, Tsoey and Hing, both imperial officials of Qi, killed Qi's warlord. Before attempting to consolidate their power with other royal family member of Qi, they tried to force Scholar Yan to acknowledge their status as legitimate; but Yan never betrayed his country.

是知天下之至剛 成於天下之至柔

We come to know that the strongest of things is constituted from the softest of things in this world.

其柔者 時之未至 義之未形 有似乎懦 及夫時至義起 九死不能屈 千金不能移
要在平日有所養 而後臨大節而不奪也

People may appear soft because the time has not come to be strong. Thus their righteous character is not tempered and they seem to be cowards, until the time comes and righteousness is needful. Then even though crisis require them to die nine times, those people do not bend. Or, bribed with millions, those people do not waver.

All these behaviors must be cultivated day by day so that at any moment, should crisis befall, their character will not be deprived of ultimate JIE.

近世三綱淪 九法斃 男女之失節者 多矣

Nowadays, the Three Cardinal Principles doctrine has fallen and the Nine Peaceful Methods to Govern a Country¹ are in ruin. People who have lost their JIE abound among us.

Note¹: Nine Methods to Govern a Country (九法 出自周禮 為佐王平邦之法) originated from the book "Propriety of Zhou".

舉世茫茫 前途渺渺

問有為臣死忠者乎 無有也

問有為子死孝者乎 無有也

問有為婦死節 為友死義者乎 無有也

The prospect of the world is bleak and the hope of the future is slim!

Suppose we ask if there be any government official would die for loyalty. The answer would be "no".

Suppose we ask if there are any offspring who would die for filial piety. The answer would be "no".

Suppose we ask if there be any widow who would die for JIE or any friend who would die for righteousness. The answer would be "no".

傷風敗俗之事 時有所聞 越禮犯法之端 舉目皆是

Stories of corruption of public morals are heard interminably. Incidents of impropriety or law-breaking are continually seen.

故我天德聖教 特標節字以曉之 曉之云者

以汝乾坤諸子 砥礪名節 而欲砥礪名節 則必先謹小節

所謂謹小節者 即一言一行 毫不苟且之謂也

Thus, our Tien De Religion promotes this character JIE to warn all those people who err.

All those who follow this TAO must better their reputation of their JIE. To better our reputation of JIE, we must care about ourselves right down to the most trifling personal matters.

Caring about even trifling personal matters means that not even one word or one gesture is carried out carelessly.

平居既有操持 臨難斯有節義

Once we comport ourselves daily in this manner, then when we are in crisis, our JIE and righteousness will then show automatically.

古之烈女 從不二夫 古之忠臣 事不二主

皆節之一字 有以堅其操 而固其守也

In olden times, the upright widow never married twice; the loyal government officials never

served other dynasties.

This is because of JIE, which strengthens one's moral principles and stabilizes one's conduct.

雁不易配 鵠忍寡棲

禽鳥尚不失節 豈以人而不知守節全節 以終其節乎

The wild goose never changes its mate for life and the swan can bear to live alone.

Thus, even birds do not lose their JIE. Then why doesn't mankind know how to observe JIE, complete JIE and end with JIE.

孔子曰 歲寒然後知松柏之後凋也

Confucius said, "Only when the year has become cold, we then know that the pine and cypress trees are the last to lose their leaves."

願與諸子共勉之

So also, we can exert ourselves to behave with JIE!