

# 禮 (LI)

禮者 聖人承天命而制之者也

天未嘗以禮與聖人 天特以禮寄聖人 俾制之 以定千秋之名分 立萬世之防閑耳

LI (Propriety, Rites) is instituted by those sages who inherit the authority of Heaven. Heaven has not given any set of LI to sages, but anticipates that they formulate LI based upon conscience, social trends and the characteristics of each current era to establish a structure affording mankind a body of enduring precepts to forever abjure mankind from transgressing their boundaries.

孔子曰 天下有道 禮樂征伐 自天子出

Confucius said, "When a country is immune with TAO, the institution of LI, the music, and the right decisions about war are determined by Son of Heaven<sup>1</sup>."

Note<sup>1</sup>: 'Son of Heaven' is a Chinese appellation for a ruler who embodies virtue and authority, and exerts his presence at the right time.

子思曰 非天子不議禮

又曰 雖有其位 苟無其德 不敢作禮樂焉

雖有其德 苟無其位 亦不敢作禮樂焉

故禮非聖人不敢作 又非在位之聖人不敢作

Zi-Si<sup>1</sup> said, "One who is not a 'Son of Heaven' is without capacity to suggest LI."

He also said, "Those who have authority but not virtue fail to compose LI and music; nor can those who have virtue but not authority promulgate LI and music."

Thus, LI cannot be established by one who is no sage or who is a sage without authority.

Note<sup>1</sup>: Zi-Si was a grandson of Confucius. See the 11th character BO for more detail.

自生民以來 五帝三王不相襲禮

然周因於殷 殷因於夏

文質之損益 雖有不同 而必以綱常為之體 則一也

此三代之禮之所以相因也

夫子答子張之問曰 其或繼周者 雖百世可知

In Chinese history, LI during the periods of 'Five Rulers and Three Emperors'<sup>1</sup> was not handed down uniformly.

However, considering the succession from Xia to Shang and Zhou Dynasties<sup>2</sup>, and although prosperity during each of the dynasties varied, the human principles and ethics were basically maintained in each dynasty.

This is how the LI within these three dynasties could contain the same foundation.

Confucius answered a question for Zy-Cheng<sup>3</sup> by replying: "Through this analysis, LI, from the Zhou Dynasty on, even going through one hundred dynasties, would basically be carried on."

Note<sup>1</sup>: The Five Rulers and Three Emperors were the earliest Chinese rulers in Chinese History.

Note<sup>2</sup>: The Xia, Shang and Zhou were the earliest dynasties in Chinese history.

Note<sup>3</sup>: Zy-Cheng was one of Confucius' students. At one time, he wanted to know how to predict the future. Confucius, thus, taught him how to analyze the past to foreknow the future using the transitional changing of LI.

孔子周人也 何以知百世之同於周禮耶

Confucius lived during the Zhou Dynasty. How could he be convinced that LI hundred dynasties later, would be the same as Zhou Dynasty had?

馬氏謂 三綱五常為禮之大體 蓋世雖有變 三綱五常不能變  
三綱五常不能變 即禮之大體不能變 此孔子所由百世可知也

Scholar Ma<sup>1</sup> explained, "The 'Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Principles'<sup>2</sup> comprise the fundamental structure of LI. Basically, the dynasty can be changed, but the 'Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Principles' cannot be changed. Since they are unchangeable, the fundamental structure of LI is unchangeable as well. This is the reason why Confucius could foresee the future of LI a hundred dynasties later."

Note<sup>1</sup>: Scholar Ma lived in the Eastern Han Dynasty (AD 25-220). He was so full of knowledge that he made many annotations to famous Chinese books.

Note<sup>2</sup>: The Three Cardinal Guides are: Ruler guides Subject, Father guides Son, Husband guides Wife.  
The Five Constant Principles are: Ruler and Subject, Father and Son, Husband and Wife, Among Brothers and Among Friends.

朱子解釋禮字 謂為天理之節文 人事之儀則

Scholar Zhu<sup>1</sup> explained the character LI as denoting a system of conscientious conduct and proper procedure in human affairs.

Note<sup>1</sup>: Scholar Zhu was noted in the chapter 7 "Yi".

所謂節文者 何也

譬如為人子者 應盡其孝 此天理也

冬溫而夏清 昏定而晨省 此節文也

To what does "conscientious conduct" refer?

For example, children must do their utmost to conduct themselves with filial piety. This proper conduct is the human conscience lived out.

Paying attention to every detail of one's parents' daily life is the conduct of LI.

孔子告樊遲曰 生 事之以禮 死 葬之以禮 祭之以禮 此皆孝之節文也

Confucius told Fan-Chi<sup>1</sup>, "When our parents are alive, we take care of them with LI. When our parents die, we bury them and conduct a memorial ceremony for them with LI. This is the conduct of filial piety."

Note<sup>1</sup>: Fan-Chi was one of Confucius students.

夫禮無一定

施之於父母 則生事葬祭 有敬謹之禮

施之於兄弟 則徐行後長 有和讓之禮

施之於朋友 則周旋進退 有交接之禮

其他 處鄉黨 入宗廟 內而家庭 外而邦國 與夫一言一語 一步一趨

靡不有當然之理

故禮者所以定尊卑 明貴賤 序少長 別男女 辨等列 習威儀也

LI has many aspects:

As we use it toward our parents, there is the LI of respect and care when we serve them either during their lives or in their funerals or memorials.

As we use it toward our brothers, there is the LI of harmony and humility when we walk alongside our brothers but behind our elders.

As we use it toward our friends, there is the LI of association when we socialize with them. In other environments, like the village clan, the fraternal hall, within our family or outwardly towards other countries, our body (by word, speech, step and our gesture) must necessarily behave according to the custom of LI.

Thus, LI is, with good reason, used to determine what is noble or inferior, to discern what is honorable or dishonorable, to identify who is junior or senior, to distinguish what is proper for male and female, to know what is high and low in rank, and to understand how to behave according to one's dignity.

聖人制禮 使天下之人 無以卑踰尊 賤妨貴 少凌長 男女有別 等第有差

Sages instituted LI in order to prevent the inferior from humiliating the noble, to deter the dishonorable from attacking the honorable, to prevent the young from brutalizing the elders. Further, LI distinguishes the difference between the conduct proper to male and female, and establishes the ranks of persons in the family.

故周禮 儀禮 曲禮諸書 所列子臣弟友之倫 升降拜跪之節

無不言之甚詳 責之甚備

Thus, the books 'Zhou Rites'<sup>1</sup>, 'Manner of Rites'<sup>2</sup> and 'Diversity of Rites'<sup>3</sup> have defined in detail the ever-constant relationships between son to father, government administrators to emperor, brothers and friends and exhaustively emphasize and treat how to rise, retreat, bow and kneel.

Note<sup>1</sup>: Zhou Rites, written by Zhou Gong, defined in detail the ranking system in the government of the Zhou Dynasty.

Note<sup>2</sup>: Manner of Rites, also called the "Rites Sutra," detailed the performance of rites towards

those we respect and towards inferior people, and rites appropriate to events of good fortune or disaster.

Note<sup>3</sup>: Diversity of Rites expounds numerous rites classifiable in the following categories:

- 1) Ritual of auspicious ceremony, like worship.
- 2) Ritual of ill luck, like losing land or country.
- 3) Ritual of diplomatic manner.
- 4) Ritual of soldiery before or after battle.
- 5) Ritual of praise out of respect for elderly.

誠知天下後世之治 不治於治 而治於循禮

天下後世之亂 不亂於亂 而亂於犯禮

故不得已而制之威儀三百 曲禮三千 以防其微 而杜其漸焉

The Sages perceptively knew that the world, now or in the future, can be well governed, not because of the mere imposition of governance itself but by governing the people to observe LI. The world, now or in the future, may be in chaos, not because of the mere occurrence of disorder itself but because people head against LI.

Thus, the sages had no alternative but to institute LI by defining as many as three hundred kinds of manners and establishing three thousand kinds of rites. This they have done in order to prevent people from having any impropriety in their hearts and to forestall any movement toward impropriety in society.

呂東萊曰 慾之寇人 甚於兵革 禮之衛人 甚於城郭

殆深見乎世之踰閒越軌 犯上作亂者 莫非起於慾之一念

而欲去其慾 則莫先乎禮

故王者制禮 所以齊民也

君子守禮 所以保身也

Scholar Lu Dong Loi said, "The attack mounted by our greedy desires is mightier than that of any army; the defense interposed by LI far exceeds the strength of any fortress."

The might of greedy desire is plain from the egregious examples of people who have betrayed their own righteousness and so departed from the course of their conscience that they have revolted against their superiors for the sake of, and indeed for none other than, the greed of selfish desire.

In order to defend against and rid us of such greedy desire, LI must be observed first and foremost.

Thus, the wise ruler institutes LI so that his citizens are brought public order; Honorable people themselves observe LI so that they protect their integrity and very personhood.

管子曰 禮義廉恥 國之四維 四維不張 國乃滅亡

Scholar Guan<sup>1</sup> said, "LI, righteousness (YI), integrity (LIAN) and sense of shamefulness are the four fundamental principles of a country. If these four principles do not prevail, the country collapses."

Note<sup>1</sup>: Scholar Guan lived in Chinese Warring period (BC 475-211) and was noted in the chapter 7 "YI".

是故 國君夫人 父母沒 使大夫寧於兄弟 禮也  
魯桓公犯此禮 及文姜如齊 卒死彭生之手  
姑姊妹已嫁而返 兄弟弗與同席 亦禮也  
齊襄公犯此禮 以通於文姜 卒召豕人之變

In ancient times, a married-away princess, though her parents had even died, could only send her servant to bring condolence from her to the royal family of her origin. Such is part of LI. Lu Huan-Gong, a duke of Lu<sup>1</sup>, and his wife, Wen-Jiang the princess of Qi, didn't observe this LI and visited her country of Qi. Eventually, Lu Huan-Gong was murdered by Pend-Sheng in the country of Qi.<sup>1</sup>

A sister who has married visits home. She cannot sit together anymore with her brothers. Such is another part of LI.

Qi Xiang-Gong, a duke of Qi, so outrageously failed to observe LI that he incestuously engaged in sexual misconduct with his sister Wen-Jiang. Eventually, suffering and death overtook Qi Xiang-Gong in the "Incident of the Boar-Person"<sup>1</sup>.

Note<sup>1</sup>: This historical incident is documented in the book 'Records of History.'

When Lu Huan-Gong and his wife, Wen-Jiang, had journeyed back to the country of Qi, Huan-Gong discovered Wen-Jiang's sexual misconduct with her brother Qi Xiang-Gong. After being scolded by her husband, Wen-Jiang remonstrated with Xiang-Gong who then decided to send Pend-Sheng to murder Huan-Gong. When the country of Lu learned of Huan-Gong's death and demanded Xiang-Gong's explanation, Xiang-Gong executed Pend-Sheng to allay the anger of Lu.

A couple of years later, Xiang-Gong went in a carriage to hunt. Suddenly in a forest, he saw an enormous boar. His servants exclaimed to him that the boar was reincarnated from Pend-Sheng. Xiang-Gong became angry and tried to shoot the boar. Suddenly, the boar rose up and toppled Xiang-Gong from his carriage, breaking his leg, whereupon the party made haste to return to his palace. As fate would have it, Xiang-Gong's rivals learned that his leg was broken so he could not move, whereupon the enemies attacked his palace and assassinated him.

其餘父子兄弟夫婦朋友之間 因越禮而滅身亡國 斬宗絕嗣者 史傳所載 指不勝屈

Other dismaying instances abound between father and son, brothers, husband and wife, and between friends. All of them departed from LI and ended in death, collapse of country, end of offspring and even family line, as have been documented numerous in history.

噫 人皆視禮為無益之煩文 謂其不必拘泥 而孰知禍之至如此哉

Alas, all too many now regard LI as worthless and annoying ritualism that justifies no adherence.

They scarcely know the serious misfortune that comes as a consequence of such complacency!

嘗考禮於天時屬夏令 於地紀屬南方 於人身屬心 於五行屬火

故禮者 嚴如斧鉞 肅若秋霜 為人所懍然不可犯者也

I have meditated on this character LI: Comparing it to the time of season, it is like as to Summer<sup>1</sup>; Comparing it to geography, it is like the southern area. LI, as regards the human anatomy, is the heart; Among the "Five Elements"<sup>1</sup>, LI is comparable to fire.

Thus, LI, which cuts as sharp as an ax or as the blade of the guillotine, yet partakes of the solemnity of the frost of Autumn, is so awe-inspiring that no one can dare to violate its sanctity.

Note<sup>1</sup>: Every Chinese character in writing can be analogized to one of the Five-Elements (metal, wood, water, fire and earth) either by number of brush-strokes of the character or by the sound of its articulation. At least in these ways, the character LI is comparable to the element of fire.

Further, traditional Chinese medicine recognizes that Five-Elements nature theory usefully represents the five main human internal organs. Thus, the lung, liver, kidney, heart and spleen correspond to metal, wood, water, fire and earth respectively.

By their own nature, each of the Five-Elements has dual manifestations that either subdue or assist other elements. For instance, a chain of the elements, in their manifestation of subduing is: metal subdues wood, wood subdues earth, earth subdues water, water subdues fire and fire subdues metal. A chain of elements assisting other elements is: metal assists water, water assists wood, wood assists fire, fire assists earth and earth assists metal.

Recognizing the dual manifestations of each element opens a distinctive path for the Chinese doctors in treatment of their patients. For instance, if a person's lung has a problem, the doctor would reason that, since fire subdues metal, the heart may be abnormally strong or weak to subdue the lung. Or, since metal assists water, the kidney is abnormally strong or weak to be assisted. Thus, the doctor not only treats the patient's lung, but also treats the person's heart and kidney, etc.

倘或犯之 則男女自由 而不以禮為嫁娶 父子平等 而不以禮判尊卑

昔人所謂衣冠禽獸者 是耶非耶

If violated, the relationship of male and female does not comply with LI and subsequently the tie of marriage becomes loosened. So also, when the relationship of father and child is by improvident innovation made equal, such does not comply with LI because there disappears the difference needed to determine when respect is due.

It is said that certain humans are beasts in human form! Is it not a true statement!

書曰 天秩有禮

禮之本 原出於天 故禮雖聖人制之 而不啻天定之也

人但知天不可犯 而不知禮不可犯 豈真知天者乎

The Sutra of the Book<sup>1</sup> said, "The order of Heaven is LI."

Thus, the root of LI originates from Heaven. Even though LI is instituted by Sages, LI is nevertheless that of Heaven.

Mankind only knows not to act against Heaven, but fails to know not to violate LI. If this be so, do they really even know anything of Heaven?

Note<sup>1</sup>: There are five Chinese classic sutras and Sutra of the Book is one of them. The rest are: the Sutra of Poetry, the Sutra of Changes (I-Ching), the Sutra of Rites and the Spring and Autumn Annals.

我教以天德命名 即以天禮為重

Our religion is named Tien De (in English 'Heavenly Virtue.') The name itself inherently emphasizes Heavenly LI.

天禮之儀文 至廣至大

姑就其狹而小者言之 吾人在家 父母坐 則侍立於旁 父母問 則敬立以對

與兄長行 則隨乎其後 兄長有事 則身服其勞

嫂叔不通問 男女不授受

姑姊妹之前 毋敢褻禮

子女侄之輩 毋或戲言

待賓客則敬貌和容 待僮僕則嚴氣正性

至於處世接物 常存誠敬之心

即果獨坐閒居 不失謹嚴之意 皆所謂禮也

豈獨冠婚喪祭之不可忽哉

The manners of Heavenly LI are vast and tremendous in import.

For now, Let us just discuss their narrower scope:

At home, when parents sit, we should stand aside and await their bidding; when parents ask, we should pay attention in conversation.

Walking along with older brother, we should follow behind.

When an elder in the family has trouble, we should try to take proper responsibility in the situation.

The brother-in-law or sister-in-law should forbear from frequent interaction in the family of their marriage.

Male and female should not give nor receive things of value between them.

In front of sisters or sister-in-law, we should make no impropriety.

Dealing with children, nephew or niece, we should make no nuisance.

Dealing with guests, we show respect, politeness and amiability.

Dealing with servants, we show strictness and uprightness.

So, as to dealing with worldly matters, we should always bear a heart of sincerity and respect. Even when we reside alone or merely have moments alone, we do not permit ourselves to become loose in our behavior.

These are all matters of LI.

Thus, it is not only at the rituals of ‘wearing hat’<sup>1</sup>, wedding, wake or memorial service that we cannot neglect to comply with LI.

Note<sup>1</sup>: The ‘wearing hat’ is an ancient Chinese ritual for a child who is at the suitable age to be pronounced an adult.

孔子曰 非禮勿視 非禮勿聽 非禮勿言 非禮勿動  
願我乾坤兩道皆識之

Confucius said,

"Thou shalt not see without complying with LI.  
Thou shalt not hear without complying with LI.  
Thou shalt not say without complying with LI.  
Thou shalt not act without complying with LI."

Let it be fervently hoped that all the believers of this TAO shall realize this teaching in mind and deed!