

# 儉 (JIAN)

儉乃奢之反

JIAN (Frugality) is the opposite of extravagance.

奢者好動 儉者好靜 奢者好難 儉者好易 奢者好煩 儉者好簡

奢者好逸樂 儉者好恬淡

此必然之理也

Extravagant people look for action but people of JIAN look for quiet enjoyment;  
Extravagant people look for difficulty but people of JIAN look for economy of motion;  
Extravagant people look for complexity but people of JIAN look for simplicity.  
Extravagant people look for glamorous pleasure but people of JIAN look for simple tranquillity.  
These, of course, are characteristics of truth itself.

世之尚奢者 半皆託言於禮

Today's people, who are fond of extravagance, half of them justify themselves by reason of worldly manners.

故譚子曰 禮貴於盛 儉貴於不盛 禮貴於備 儉貴於不備

禮貴於簪纓 儉貴於布素 禮貴於炳煥 儉貴於寂寞

Thus, Scholar Tam<sup>1</sup> said,

"Worldly manners emphasize excessive exuberance but JIAN people do not;  
Worldly manners emphasize overly elaborate arrangements but JIAN people do not;  
Worldly manners emphasize expensive hair pin or band but JIAN people are not ashamed of plain ones; Worldly manners emphasize a flashy lifestyle but JIAN people are not ashamed of a quiet life."

Note<sup>1</sup>: Scholar Tam was a famous Taoist in Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907).

富而富之愈不樂 貴而貴之愈不美

金玉者 富之常 官爵者 貴之常

渴飲則甘 餓食則香

Fortune, to already-wealthy people, makes them feel no happier. Fame, to already-famous people, makes them feel no more eminent.

For gold and jade are merely common valuables to the rich; indeed, the positions of imperial officials or nobility are merely common valuables of eminence.

Water is never as sweet as to one thirsty, nor is food as tasty as when you are hungry.

夫惟儉 可以知非

觀於此言 則知儉乃德之基 奢乃惡之漸

Only by behaving with JIAN, can we come to know how wrong are greedy, wanton thoughts and extravagances.

Thus, we see that JIAN is a foundation of virtue, and extravagance is the root of vice.

睹食象者 以食牛為不足 睹戴冕者 以戴冠為不足

不足有所自 蓋失於不簡 不簡有所自 蓋始於多慾

People who see another eating elephant meat feel discontent with beef at their own table; People who see another wearing a crown find discontent with the hat on their own head.

At root of discontent is an error of not living simply; at root, not-living-simply begins from endless desires.

惟清心寡慾之士 能抱中守一以全於儉

Only those people who calm their mind and cast out their desires, can be properly composed to take on the character of JIAN.

先儒有云 儉於聽 可以養虛 儉於視 可以養神 儉於言 可以養氣

儉於動 可以養精 儉於私 可以護富 儉於公 可以保貴

儉於門閭 可以無盜賊 儉於環衛 可以無叛亂 儉於職官 可以無奸佞

儉於嬪嬙 可以保壽命 儉於心思 可以出生死

Scholars of the ages have said:

"Applying JIAN in hearing nurtures the soul;

Applying JIAN in seeing nurtures the spirit;

Applying JIAN in speaking husbands our energy;

Applying JIAN to physical action nurtures the essence of our bodies;

Applying JIAN to selfishness protects our fortune;

Applying JIAN in impartiality maintains our nobility;

Applying JIAN as regards the front door and fence foils the thief;

Applying JIAN as regards security measures forestalls mutiny;

Applying JIAN to administration roots out corrupt officials;

Applying JIAN as to concubines preserves our life;

Applying JIAN to think can even break us free from the cycle of life and death."

是知儉可為萬化之柄也

Thus, we know that using JIAN transforms everything we do.

吾聞王者皆知御一可以治天下 而不知孰為一之  
夫萬道皆有一 仁亦有一 義亦有一 禮亦有一 智亦有一 信亦有一  
一能貫五 五能宗一者 天下可以治

We hear: every ruler is convinced of but one way to rule his country, but none knows the 'ONE'<sup>1</sup>.

Why? Because every way of governance has its own ONE.

Consider for instance:

Benevolence has its own ONE - love;

Righteousness also has its own ONE - obligation;

Propriety also has its own ONE - respect;

Intelligence also has its own ONE - knowledge;

Trustfulness also has its own ONE - the symbol of authority.

Only JIAN links all the above five doctrines, and merges them together into the ONE way to govern the world.

Note<sup>1</sup>: ONE, in Taoism, is used very often because, it is said, the figure ONE is born from Tao.

其道蓋簡 而出自簡之 其言蓋玄 而入自玄之

The way of JIAN is simple because it emphasizes simplicity. This wisdom is metaphysical and its meaning is not easily explained.

是故言守一之道 莫過乎儉

儉之所律 則仁不蕩 義不浪 禮不奢 智不變 信不惑

Nonetheless, when talking about the way of observing ONE, there is nothing better than JIAN.

Under the discipline of JIAN,

the act of benevolence does not subsequently accede to lust;

the act of righteousness does not subsequently accede to unrestraint;

the act of propriety does not subsequently accede to extravagance;

the act of intelligence does not subsequently accede to cunning;

the act of trustfulness does not subsequently accede to perplexity;

心有所主 而用有所本 取有所限 而民有所賴

When people in power have their minds disciplined by JIAN and employ the principle of JIAN, the citizens endure little hardship at the hand of a government on which they rely and in a land in which they thrive.

故君儉則臣知足 臣儉則士知足 士儉則民知足 民儉則天下知足

天下知足 所以無貪財 無競名 無欺罔 無驕佞

Thus, when a ruler governs with JIAN, his government ministers are relatively content. When government ministers live with JIAN, civil servants are relatively content. When civil servants live with JIAN, citizens are relatively content. When the citizens live with JIAN, the whole

world is content.

If the world were content in this way, neither greed for money or fame, nor deceit nor conceit would plague us.

渾渾噩噩 還我太古之風 行我三皇之化 而天下治矣

Indeed, the climate of our ancient simpler times would be once again attained. The Governing of Three Emperors<sup>1</sup> would be at hand and the world would flourish.

Note<sup>1</sup>: The Three Emperors were the ancient Chinese pre-history emperors: They were Sui-Ren (燧人) who taught people how to use fire to burn food; Fu-Xi (伏羲) who taught people how to hunt fish and animals; and Shen-Nun (神農) who taught people how to farm.

古之君子 有保一器而畢生無豐者 有掛一裘而終身不敝者  
非過慳也 所以惜福惜名 兼惜德耳

Some ancient honorable people could use a single tool for their entire lives without breaking that tool. Indeed, some could wear but a single coat for their entire lives without wearing that garment out.

They did not do so because they were miserly, but because they treasured their fortune and reputation as well as their virtue.

世之有慳號者 人以為大辱 殊不知此乃純儉之道也  
於己無所與 於人無所取 我耕我食 我蠶我衣  
人不怨之 神不罪之 夫奚有不可者

Nowadays, people who are called ‘miserly’ would feel terribly insulted. However, they also fail to realize that absolute frugality is the way of JIAN.

For themselves, they of JIAN give no extra; from others, they take nothing. I farm food for my own consumption; I breed silkworms for my own clothing.

Doing this, no one should complain and no deity does punish. There is no reason why this cannot be the universal way of living.

故一人知儉一家富 王者知儉天下富  
儉之為義大矣哉

Thus, when one person lives JIAN, one family becomes rich; when a ruler lives for JIAN, his whole land becomes rich.

Thus, the impact of JIAN is tremendously encompassing.

今世之士 一踞要津 則剝取民膏民脂以自富  
甚或攻城奪地 擄掠金玉珍寶 以供其妻妾 輿馬 衣服 宮室之奉  
且或散之於麻雀撲克 而不加惜焉

In our days, as soon as a so-called "civil servant" attains an important position, he feeds on the people's very flesh and blood to enrich himself.  
Some of these leeches are even worse, invading people's properties and looting people's treasures to lavish on their wives and mistresses, and to support the expense of their own private carriages, luxurious wardrobes, and palatial homes.  
Or, they dissipate the people's money in reckless gambling, without the least sense of whose treasure they have squandered.

噫 若而人者 不亦自喪其德 自減其福乎

Alas, for those iniquitous people, they disgrace their own morals and diminish their own fortune.

吾又聞諸譚子 儉於臺榭則民有餘力 儉於寶貨則民有餘財 儉於戰伐則民有餘時

Scholar Tam has said:

"Applying JIAN in lieu of government towers and pavilions, citizens will have ample energy;<sup>1</sup> applying JIAN to government treasures and goods, citizens will have sufficient money; applying JIAN to warfare, citizens will have leisure time."

Note<sup>1</sup>: When government undertakes construction projects, citizens have been requisitioned to mandatorily contribute their manpower.

不與之 猶與之 不取之 猶取之  
海伯亡魚 不出於海 國君亡馬 不出於國

JIAN seems like not giving, but it is giving; JIAN seems like not taking, but it is taking. JIAN is as it is said: "Fish might get lost were they not always in the water; horses might get lost were they not always on land."

治政者能體斯義 則下無民窮財盡之虞 上無喪德減福之失  
治身者能體斯義 則外有廉取仁施之德 內有省心節慾之功 不亦盡美而盡善乎

When government officials take this doctrine to heart in their public policy, there will be no worry of citizens living poorly and not enough money for government; as towards government officials, there will be no chance for them to make any mistakes to end up ruining one's morals or depriving one of one's fortune.

When people who behave themselves take this doctrine to heart, they not only receive things honestly and distribute necessities benevolently to other people, but also have the skill to search their own hearts and moderate their own desires. Is this not magnificent!

故曰 惟儉者可以親百姓 可以司粟帛 可以掌符璽  
可以即清靜之道

Thus, it is said:

"People of JIAN are those who can be close to the citizens.

People of JIAN are those who can be administrators of food and necessary supply.

People of JIAN are those who can have authority."

All that is said above precisely approximates the TAO of peace and quiet!