

## Becoming a Vessel or Not

### An Analysis of *jun zi bu qi* 君子不器

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#### Abstract

The *Analects* focuses on the theme of how an exemplary person (*jun zi* 君子) should cultivate himself. In the *Analects*, the Master speaks of exemplary persons in so many situations that the reader easily obtains an impression of what constitutes an exemplary person. However, one perplexing passage regarding the exemplary person is found in the *Analects* (2.12). Due to its extreme succinctness, the Master's remark, *jun zi bu qi* 君子不器, which has been interpreted in many ways by ancient Chinese commentators and influential English translators, is enigmatic, not merely grammatically, but also literally. The principal aim of this essay is to make the *Analects* 2.12 clear and try to offer a constructive interpretation of this passage. In order to show the meaning of *jun zi bu qi* as a positive attitude of Confucius, I outline the interpretations of some ancient Chinese commentaries and famous English translations, and then propose an interpretation of *jun zi bu qi* that yields a consistent reading of the *Analects* after a brief grammatical analysis. The conclusion of this paper is: as the perfect and complete manifestation of Confucian humanism, a *jun zi* should not be a mere specialist but rather a comprehensive vessel (*qi*) in *li*, for once a *jun zi* is such a specialist, then he is not worth the name of the exemplary person, and he is nothing but an ordinary utensil devoid of characteristics.

#### Key words

*qi* 器, a vessel, *jun zi* 君子 (an exemplary person), self-cultivation

#### Introduction

In some sense the *Analects* focuses on the theme of how an exemplary person (*jun zi* 君子) should cultivate himself. In the *Analects*, the Master speaks of exemplary persons in so many situations that the reader easily obtains an impression of what constitutes an exemplary person. However, one perplexing passage regarding the exemplary person is found in the *Analects* (2.12). Due to its extreme succinctness, the Master's remark, *jun zi bu qi* 君子不器, which has been interpreted in many ways by ancient Chinese commentators and Western translators, is enigmatic, not merely

grammatically, but also literally. What is the part of speech<sup>1</sup> of *qi* 器: a noun or a verb? What is the grammatical function of *bu* 不 in *jun zi bu qi*: a copula or a negative adverb? What sort of claim does this sentence make? Some famous Chinese commentators and English translators consider the meaning of this verse to be that the exemplary person is not a vessel which only has a specific use. Hence, if the exemplary person is not a vessel, then why does the Master say that Zigong is a vessel?<sup>2</sup> If *bu qi* is a quality of the exemplary person, how can one avoid the contradiction that the exemplary person should employ other people like using utensils?<sup>3</sup> If *bu qi* should be a quality of the exemplary person, how can one explain that the Master himself was skilled in menial things when he was young?<sup>4</sup>

The principal aim of this essay is to address these questions and offer a constructive interpretation of the *Analects* 2.12. In order to show the meaning of *jun zi bu qi* as a positive attitude of Confucius, I outline the interpretations of some ancient Chinese commentaries and famous English translations, and then propose an interpretation of *jun zi bu qi* that yields a consistent reading of the *Analects* after a brief grammatical analysis.

### *qi* 器 in the *Analects*

I begin by briefly analyzing the meanings of *qi* 器 that are presented in the *Analects*. The character *qi* only appears six times in the *Analects*. The first time it appears is in 2.12, which is the very verse under discussion. The second time it appears is in 3.22, consisting of the passage “*Guan Zhong zhi qi xiao zai*” 管仲之器小哉. Here the literal meaning of *qi* is the capacity of a vessel. As a metaphor, it refers to the ambition and capacity of Guan Zhong. The third and the fourth place *qi* appears is in 5.4, when Zigong asks Confucius about what Zigong himself is. The Master’s reply is that Zigong is a vessel, a *bu lian* 瑚璉. Here, *qi* means a very concrete vessel, a special ritual vessel. It seems that the answer to Zigong’s question contradicts *jun zi bu qi*, if *jun zi bu qi* is equivalent to tell us that an exemplary person is not a vessel, because as one of the most successful disciples of Confucius,<sup>5</sup> Zigong should be an exemplary person and thus have the quality of “*bu qi*.” The fifth place the character *qi* appears is in 13.25, consisting of the passage “*ji qi shi ren yan, qi zhi*” 及其使人焉, 器之. Obviously, the character *qi* in this verse is used as a transitive verb, rather than as a noun. Here *qi* means “in employing others, they use them according to their abilities.”<sup>6</sup> When the Master is

1 Whether the parts of speech exist in Chinese is still a debatable question among linguists.

2 The *Analects* 5.4.

3 Ibid, 13.25.

4 Ibid, 9.6.

5 In the *Analects*, as one of the early disciples noted, the frequency of Zigong showing up is far greater than it is for any of Confucius’ other disciples. This emphasizes his important status when the *Analects* came into being. Also, see Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian, Shi ji 67, the Biographies of Confucius’ Disciples*, where Sima Qian provides a very clear picture of Zigong’s activities, although some scholars have doubted that the main material source of *Shi ji 67* is from the *Analects*, as there are no records about the activities of those disciples.

6 See Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 1999), p. 168. Here Ames and Rosemont, Jr., translated *qi* as

questioned by Zigong about how to practice *ren* 仁, *qi* was introduced for the last time in this Confucian canon. “A craftsman [who] wishes to practice his craft well must first sharpen his tools”<sup>7</sup> is part of the Master’s reply. In this case, *qi* means a craftsman’s tools. Thus, regardless of what part of speech of *qi* is, when *qi* is introduced by Confucius on different occasions, it either means a vessel as a metaphor or a process as a verb that coheres with a vessel. This then raises the question: What is the grammatical function of the *qi* of *jun zi bu qi*? If it differs from other usages in the *Analects*, what idea does it embody? Let us turn to ancient Chinese commentaries first.

## Ancient Chinese Commentaries and English Translations

There are many Chinese commentaries on the *Analects* and various English translations in the West. In this section, I outline a simplified picture of the main commentaries and English translations of the *Analects* 2.12 to illustrate how *jun zi bu qi* is understood and explained.

Generally, scholars consider He Yan’s 何晏 commentary, *Assembled Explanations of the Analects* 論語集解, as the first influential commentary among all ancient Chinese commentaries. It is considered one that has preserved many commentators’ surviving fragments. Although most of the commentators who appear in He Yan’s book have been easily regarded as Daoists rather than Confucians, the way the commentators have interpreted the *Analects* could never be overlooked by any specialist of this area.

After adopting the interpretation of Bao Xian 包咸, He Yan comments,

器者，各周其用，至於君子，無所不施也。

All kinds of *qi* are used according to their own specific utilities; as to a *jun zi*, he is able to be employed everywhere.<sup>8</sup>

Here He Yan emphasizes that *qi* only has its own specific aspect to be used, whereas a *jun zi* goes beyond this limitation by doing what they should do according to the standard of a *jun zi*. The problem here is how to interpret *wu suo bu shi* 無所不施 in detail. The two commentators did not provide further explanations of this expression, so it is difficult to discern how He Yan or other commentators featured in this book understood how a *jun zi* should act.

Later, Huang Kan 皇侃 of the Liang Dynasty and Xing Bing 邢昺 of the Northern Song Dynasty elaborated on He Yan’s commentary. Huang Kan’s explanation reads:

此章明君子之人不系守一業也，器者給用之物也。

The verse clearly explains a *jun zi* does not limit himself to only one profession, and *qi* is

abilities. This translation should be taken from the metaphor of the capability of a vessel.

7 D. C. Lau, *Confucius: The Analects* (London: Penguin Group, 1979), p. 133.

8 See e-SiKuQuanShu (e-SKQS, 文淵閣四庫全書電子版) 四庫全書, 經部, 四書類, 論語集解義疏, 卷一.

something that can be used by people.<sup>9</sup>

Xing Bing continues to explain:

此章明君子之德也。

The verse clearly explains *jun zi*'s virtues.<sup>10</sup>

Xing Bing's explanation is a little different from that of Huang Kan, except in the interpretation of the meaning of *qi*. Unlike Huang Kan, Xing Bing emphasizes the quality of virtue that a *jun zi* should possess, so *bu qi* is explained as this quality. What Xing Bing emphasizes here is that the virtue of *jun zi* is not like the quality of a tool. He considers that *bu qi* is a required virtue that *jun zi* should possess:

君子之德則不如器，物各守一用，言見幾而作，無所不施也。

Each tool only has one usage, but a *jun zi* is not so because he will respond properly when the chance comes, and once a *jun zi* takes actions, he is able to be employed everywhere to accomplish any tasks.<sup>11</sup>

As a matter of fact, before Buddhism took hold in China, the effort to understand the *Analects* in terms of the *xici* 繫辭 of the *Book of Changes* could be traced back to earlier times. Some commentators borrowed the theory on the relationship between *dao* 道 and *qi* 器, which provides an ontological basis for the philosophy in *xici*. In this essay, I will not deal with this theme because it is related to a far more complicated and debatable thought in *xici*.<sup>12</sup> It is well known that Buddhism

9 See *Lunyu zhu shu*, in Ruan Yuan, ed., *Shisan jing zhu shu* 十三經註疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1980, 1982) 2.2462.

10 Ibid. 2.2462.

11 Ibid. 2.2462.

12 Some others compared *qi* 器 to *dao* 道, for there is a famous and important saying in the *xici* 繫辭 of the *Book of Changes*, "That is beyond the form is named as *dao*, and that is under the form is named as *qi*" 形而上者謂之道，形而下者謂之器. Those scholars who presented their commentaries of the *Analects* from the perspective of *xici* in some way believed that this distinction between the two terms in the *xici* sheds light on the interpretation of the *Analects*, and later formed a theory on the relationship between *dao* and *qi*, which profoundly shaped later Chinese intellectual discussions. However, in the *Analects*, the Master and his disciples never juxtapose *qi* and *dao* and seldom mention the *Book of Changes*. (At most, only in one place they mentioned the *Book of Changes*; see the *Analects* 7.17; even in this place, whether the Master really talked about the *Book of Changes* is not so certain.) Moreover, no evidence exists to show that the thought of the *Analects* was apparently influenced by the *Book of Changes*; thus, the relationship between the *Analects* and the *Book of Changes* is not certain, and it is far-fetched to associate the two influential works unconditionally. Without difficulty, readers can easily find that some commentaries interpreted *jun zi bu qi* from the perspective of *xici* and even hereby explained this statement according to the theory on the relationship between *dao* 道 and *qi* 器. Therefore, it seems a little imprudent to investigate the immanent meaning of the statement. To explain the *Analects* from the *xici* of the *Book of Changes* of view often brings *xici*'s perspectives into the understanding of the *Analects* in spite of some points, whether they never belong to the *Analects* and deviate from the primary signification of this statement, which firstly appears in the context of the *Analects* without referring to any

exercised a profound influence over Zhu Xi's interpretation of the Confucian classical works. After Hu Yuan 胡瑗 (993–1059) borrowed Buddhist terms *ti* 體 (Body, Substance, Principle) and *yong* 用 (Use, Function, Application) to expound on how to practice Confucian self-cultivation, some of the commentators also subsequently explicated *jun zi bu qi* in terms of the relationship between the two terms, i.e., *ti* and *yong*.

Zhu Xi's commentary on *jun zi bu qi* shows the influence of Buddhism. However, it is difficult to know if Zhu Xi understands *jun zi bu qi* in terms of *xici* when explicating the *Analects*, for he did not mention *xici* at all in *The Collection Commentaries of the Four Books* 四書集注. Similarly, his commentaries do not talk about the influence of Buddhism, although he had been immersed in Buddhism for many years when he was young and he introduced many Buddhist terms in some of his other works.<sup>13</sup> Admittedly, the Buddhist influence on his understanding of the *Analects* is obvious. As for how to explain *jun zi bu qi*, after quoting the verse in his commentaries, Zhu Xi points out that each *qi* has its own shortcoming, that is, each *qi* only has its special quality and cannot be generally used. And he provided his reason:

器者各適其用，而不能相通，成德之士體無不具，故用無不周，非特為一材一藝而已。

All utensils are fit for their own usages, and cannot go through each other; those who morally practice self-cultivation have all kinds of *ti* 體 and then their every application will be accomplished without being limited within one material or craftsmanship.<sup>14</sup>

This interpretive effort emphasizes that an exemplary person who polishes himself, in a way, possesses all general principles rather than having the functions as mere *qi*. He borrows *yong* 用 to understand the quality of *qi*, *ti* to understand the quality of *bu qi*, respectively. This explanation is quite thoughtful. Unfortunately, on the one hand, Zhu Xi did not provide an explanation as to exactly what the quality of *bu qi*, i.e., *ti*, is. On the other hand, his explanation was obviously influenced by Buddhism.<sup>15</sup> Like the other commentators prior to him, he explains *qi* more as a noun in his commentary. It is difficult to determine whether this interpretation of *qi* is endowed with any dynamical meaning.

Like the Chinese commentaries, differences among many of the English translations of 2.12 can be traced to the different understandings of it. But compared to the former, the English translators seldom paid attention to *dao* and *qi*, or *ti* and *yong* in their translations, so it is much easier and clearer to see how they understand *jun zi bu qi*. Mainly, translators treat *bu qi* as “it is not a utensil or a vessel or an implement.” James Legge, for example, translated *jun zi bu qi* as “the accomplished scholar is not a utensil.” Like Legge, D. C. Lau's version is “the gentleman is no vessel.” Arthur Waley's translation is “a gentleman is not an implement.” In his annotation, Waley takes “an implement” that is specialized and used only for a special purpose. But Waley also affirms that *jun zi*

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other theoretical works. This may mean the *Analects* has a considerably self-sustained system. If we believe this, then the original signification of *jun zi bu qi* should occur in the reading of the book itself without the help of other theoretical works.

13 See Wing-tsit Chan 陳榮捷, *Zhu Zi xin tan suo* 朱子新探索 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1988).

14 e-SiKuQuanShu (e-SKQS, 文淵閣四庫全書電子版) SKQS. 經部, 四書類, 四書大全, 論語集註大全, 卷二.

15 He borrowed so many Buddhist terms that one can take him to be a Buddhist in some sense.

“need only have general moral qualifications.”<sup>16</sup> The main difference between the three versions is the noun’s choice for *qi*.

Because of the adverbial modifier “mere,” Ames and Rosemont’s translation “exemplary persons are not mere vessels,” differs from those of other translators. This translation reveals that Ames and Rosemont regarded a *jun zi* as a vessel but one possessing qualities beyond that of a vessel. In spite of the above-mentioned differences, the similarities among most of the translations of *jun zi bu qi* are obvious: *qi* is treated as a noun and *bu* is treated as a copula.

In sum, there are two understandings of *jun zi bu qi* according to Chinese commentaries and English translations:

*a.* A *jun zi* is neither a ritual vessel nor a tool, for any tool only possesses its own specific usage, and *jun zi* is not so specific and limited.

*b.* A *jun zi* is not a mere vessel. This means that a *jun zi* could be a vessel or tool, but there are some qualities beyond the limitations of becoming a vessel or tool.

Although proposition *b* seems more reasonable for it vitiates its inconsistency with the fact that Confucius said that Zigong is a vessel, the problem of proposition *b* is obvious; it adds the adverbial modifier “mere,” which is absent in the original verse. If proposition *a* is tenable, i.e., a *jun zi* is not a vessel or an implement, then how can one understand the Master’s saying that Zigong is a *qi* in 5.4? Does this mean Zigong, who could be the distinguished ritual vessel *hu lian*, is not a *jun zi*? Because of Zigong’s prominent status in the *Analects*, this conclusion seems not so convincing. Moreover, if the proposition that a *jun zi* is not a vessel is accepted, then whether the Master himself is a *jun zi* will be called into question in the *Analects*. The Master, in 9.6, admits he was of a humble station when he was young and that he was skilled in many menial things, yet a *jun zi* should not be skilled in many things.

## Becoming a vessel or not

The common assumption of the two propositions mentioned above interpret *bu* 不 as *fei* 非, which means “be not.” First, in terms of grammar, I doubt whether this reading is accurate enough so that the commentators and translators expound its implication well. The characters *fei* and *bu* are not interchangeable in most cases in the *Analects*, and in my opinion, *bu* cannot be interpreted as *fei* in the verse of *jun zi bu qi*. Generally, *fei* is used far more independently than *bu*. The character *fei* may be used as a negative part of a predicate, a negative part of a noun, and, in some cases, it can be used as a complete predicate<sup>17</sup>. However, *bu* often is only used as a negative part of a predicate of an unabridged sentence. In this regard, the *bu* of *bu qi* is more likely to be a negative part of a predicate, and hence the *qi* of *bu qi* is more likely to be a verb.

For our purposes, let me consider both the *qi* of *jun zi bu qi* and the *qi* of *qi zhi* 器之 in 2.12 and 13.25, respectively. Generally speaking, there is no doubt that the grammatical function of *qi* 器 is a predicate in the two verses. From the signification of the two predicates, it seems easier to decide

<sup>16</sup> Arthur Waley, *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Random House Inc. 1989), p. 90.

<sup>17</sup> For example, *fei ye* 非也 is a complete and negative sentence.

the latter *qi*'s meaning than it is to determine the former *qi*'s meaning according to the context. Clearly, the *qi* of *qi zhi* is a transitive verb, which means taking others to be *qi*. The expression *jun zi bu qi* compose an independent sentence that constitutes a complete verse by itself. The *bu* of *bu qi* as an adverb cannot be understood as a copula. Hence, from a grammatical point of view, *bu* of *bu qi* should not be understood as "be not." Based on the fact that *qi* is used as an intransitive verb, *jun zi bu qi* should be understood as "*jun zi* should not become a vessel or an implement." Instead of being a mere ordinary description of *jun zi*, this understanding shows a dynamical process in which a *jun zi* endeavors to be active to cultivate self and not to become something fixed on one specific usage. So it is reasonable to believe that *jun zi bu qi* is not an assertion to teach the disciples that a *jun zi* is not something, but rather to teach them to try actively not to become something fixed.

Considering *qi* of *jun zi bu qi* as a noun cannot clarify its meaning, which raises the question of what happens when *qi* is treated as an intransitive verb. Though some commentators probably had already taken *qi* to be a verb, they failed to emphasize it. One sees that taking *qi* to be a verb yields fruitful results, including solving the seeming conflicts between *jun zi bu qi* and other verses in the *Analects*, as well as the seeming contradiction between the meaning of *jun zi bu qi* and the main conclusions of Herbert Fingarette's *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*.

To begin, the conflicts between *jun zi bu qi* and some other verses in the *Analects* are solved. It seems that, when explained as "the exemplary person is not a vessel," this verse apparently disagrees with other two verses, i.e., that the Master tells Zigong he is a noble vessel (5.4) and that the Master is skilled in menial things (9.6). But, if we take *jun zi bu qi* to be "*jun zi* should not become a vessel," those conflicts disappear. Unlike "a *jun zi* is not a vessel," "a *jun zi* should not become a vessel" does not present the quality of *jun zi* but rather affirms what *jun zi* should try not to become. Even if one becomes a vessel, we still cannot say that one is definitely not a *jun zi*, because whether one is a vessel or not does not constitute the quality of *jun zi*, that is to say, whether one becomes a vessel or not is not the precondition of being a *jun zi*. The quality of *jun zi* does not lie in whether one is a vessel, nor does it lie in whether one is skilled menial things. Therefore, Zigong could be a noble vessel in spite of whether he was a real *jun zi*, and the Master could be skilled in many things when he was young in spite of whether he later became a *jun zi*. A *jun zi* could become a vessel and do menial things; however, a *jun zi* should never be limited to becoming a vessel or an implement. This is why the Master says a *jun zi* should not be skilled in menial things. The crucial task of a *jun zi* is to learn and morally practice self-cultivation. In addition, *jun zi* should concentrate their minds on morality instead of doing menial things or becoming noble vessels.

I diverge for a moment to Socratic moral teaching and to the way that Fingarette understood the exemplary person as being a Holy Vessel in *li*. To become a vessel or to be skilled in menial things is not so difficult to learn, but to be a *jun zi* by acting and practicing humanness (*ren* 仁) and righteousness (*yi* 義) is so hard that there is almost no teacher who can teach people how to accomplish this. Not only did Confucius emphasize knowing self and improving the moral capacity of self, but Socrates also suggested these goals in the Axis Period. The two thinkers both disagreed with the viewpoint that knowledge (including moral knowledge) is merely composed of all kinds of craftsmanship. Socrates defined attaining knowledge as reflecting on everyday life, similar to what the oracle of Delphi Temple told people, "Know yourself," and Socrates claimed that it is necessary

to practice this kind of knowledge in the right way.<sup>18</sup> Socratic teaching of knowing yourself is used as a sort of catalyst. Like Socrates, Confucius also emphasized the importance of seeing into oneself and accomplishing one's morality. Though, obviously, the definition of Confucian self-cultivation is very different from Socrates's moral ideas, Confucius was not like some of his contemporaries, such as the Mohists, who hardly ever sought the transcendent meaning of morality or practiced self-cultivation. According to the *Analects*, the Master was so good at many kinds of craftsmanship that people of the time might have thought that he was versatile. However, the Master did not emphasize any of his craftsmanship; but rather, he believed that *jun zi* should not become craftsmen, i.e., vessels. The reason is not difficult to see. Morality, such as *ren* and *yi*, which are the sprouts to cultivating self, cannot be taught as a skill or craftsmanship unless morality is taught by personal example as well as verbal instructions. Therefore, self-cultivation is not a kind of craftsmanship that can be sold out like the ancient Greek sophists' knowledge. This is why the Master did not want to teach his disciples to grow crops and vegetables or to develop any type of craftsmanship<sup>19</sup>. Rather, he wants to teach his disciples how to love and practice the rites, righteousness, and trustworthiness, for the purpose of self-cultivation is not to be a specific craftsman, that is, a vessel, but to become a *jun zi*, a person who can correct the moral mistakes and keep community in a civilized and harmonious state.

Fingarette's interpretive and distinctive understanding of *qi* opens a possibility for appreciating Confucius' insights of *qi*. As I have argued, a *jun zi* is not supposed to try to become *qi*, but he is allowed to be *qi* when necessary. For Confucius, to be a *qi* meant becoming a method; this is why he objected to becoming a *qi*, which only possesses a specific use but has no general use. Confucius believed *jun zi* should go beyond the limitation of becoming a mere specific implement. Fingarette believed that a *jun zi* is a Holy Vessel, which is the main conclusion of his famous book; however, it seems that this contradicts Confucius' teaching. Do the two attitudes toward *jun zi* really contradict each other? In my opinion, these two different attitudes do not contradict each other. As I have argued, Confucius emphasized that a *jun zi* should try not to become a vessel in general which only has a specific use. Here, the vessel is an ordinary vessel which is utilitarian. The sacred Holy vessel Fingarette talks about is not an ordinary vessel in general with a specific use; rather, it is a vessel which has moral symbolizations. In this sense, what Fingarette emphasized does not conflict with that of Confucius. Based on his understanding of *jun zi bu qi*, Fingarette was convinced that the general opinion among the commentaries of *jun zi bu qi* is wrong.<sup>20</sup> Fingarette also believed that the paradox between the verse of *jun zi bu qi* and the statement that Zigong is a vessel should be resolved by understanding *jun zi* as a sacred Holy Vessel (therefore *jun zi* should not be like utensils in general; nor should they be external to the ceremony of *li*<sup>21</sup>). When we regard a *jun zi* as a vessel in the sense of both an instrument and an end, we also resolve this paradox in a broader sense. On the one hand, a *jun zi* might become a utensil which can finish specific tasks, for example, the edu-

18 See Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 4.4, "People say," he added, "that if a man wants to get his horse or his ox taught in the right way, the world is full of instructors; but if he would learn himself, or have his son or his slave taught in the way of right, he cannot tell where to find such instruction."

19 See the *Analects* 13.4.

20 Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius, The Secular as Sacred* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1998), p. 74.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 75.



cated person's governing and management, or *jun zi*'s employing others. On the other hand, *jun zi* need not become utensils in general, rather, they should be the Holy Vessel which is not utilitarian and which is a constitutive element in the ceremony.<sup>22</sup> Here *jun zi* should regard themselves as the ultimate end because of their sacredness in the relationship of *li*.

## Conclusion

To conclude the study, after a short grammatical analysis, a commentary analysis and an English translation analysis, I argued that *jun zi bu qi* should not be explained or translated as “a *jun zi* (an exemplary person) is not a vessel,” rather, it should be understood as “an exemplary person should not (try to) become a vessel”. Moreover, whether one is a vessel or not does not constitute the quality of an exemplary person. The exemplary person should possess some general moral qualifications. As Wing-tsit Chan suggested, the basic characteristic of the spirit of Confucianism is humanism,<sup>23</sup> and this humanism must be a comprehensive and profound manifestation. Humanism cannot be kept only within certain limits, such as having one skill or a few specific skills. Therefore, as the perfect and complete manifestation of Confucian humanism, a *jun zi* should not be a mere specialist but rather a comprehensive vessel (*qi*) in *li*. Once a *jun zi* is such a specialist, then he is not worth the name of the exemplary person, and he is nothing but an ordinary utensil devoid of characteristics.

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22 Ibid., p. 75.

23 Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 3.