

The Connotation of "Joy" in the *Analects*

Shiquan Peng

School of Liberal Arts, Mianyang Normal University, Mianyang, China

Abstract

The connotation of "joy" in the *Analects* is rich and multifaceted. Its ideology of "joy" manifests, on the level of moral cultivation, as the "joy" of learning, the "joy" of returning to ritual, and the "joy" of contentment in poverty. On the level of external conduct in the world, it appears as the "joy" of friendship, the "joy" of filial piety, and the "joy" of serving in office. On the level of personality and spiritual attainment, it embodies the sage-like demeanor of "the benevolent are free from anxiety; the wise are free from perplexity; the courageous are free from fear." This profound ideological connotation of "joy" corresponds to the essential meaning of the Confucian learning of "inner sageliness and outer kingliness", laying a crucial foundation for the development and interpretation of later thought.

Keywords

Analects; Joy of Cultivation; Joy of Conduct; Joy of Attainment.

1. Introduction

Within the text of the *Analects*, the character "joy" appears 47 times, 27 of which pertain to emotional joy. Examining the rich connotations behind this "joy" reveals its relevance to the individual's "joy" of moral cultivation, the "joy" of external conduct in the world, and the "joy" of the sage's personality and spiritual attainment. These three aspects construct a comprehensive and relatively systematic structural connotation of the philosophy of "joy." This paper will deeply explore and interpret Confucius's thought on "joy" from these three perspectives.

2. The Joy of Cultivation

Confucian learning is known by later generations as the "learning of inner sageliness and outer kingliness." Therefore, when discussing its thought on "joy," the "joy" of cultivation sometimes inevitably involves aspects of conduct; however, there is ultimately a general boundary between the two. "Inner sageliness" pertains more to self-moral cultivation and refinement, while "outer kingliness" pertains more to the level of conducting oneself and governing the world. This section analyzes the aspects of "joy" related to inner cultivation, proposing that its manifestations can be divided into three aspects: joy in learning, joy in ritual, and joy in poverty.

2.1. Joy in Learning

First is joy in learning. The *Analects* begins by stating: "Is it not a joy to learn and to practice what is learned from time to time?" (*Xue Er*)[1]1. Zhu Xi commented: "yue is the same as happy. To learn means to emulate. Human nature is all good, but awareness has sequence. Those who become aware later must emulate the actions of those who became aware first, so that they may understand goodness and return to their original state. xi is like a bird practicing flight. Learning without cease is like a bird practicing flight repeatedly. yue means delight. Having learned and furthermore practicing from time to time, what one has learned becomes familiar, and the heart is delighted and pleased; progress naturally cannot cease." [2]47 While Zhu Xi's use of "emulate" to discuss "learning" may be slightly imprecise, and his statement "understand

goodness and return to the original state" may not fully align with Confucius's original intent, he undoubtedly captures the key Confucian emphasis on learning: moral cultivation and refinement. The crucial method for this moral cultivation and refinement lies in the practice of "reviewing". The virtue spoken of by Confucians is often realized in specific daily moral practices, as seen in Zixia's words: "...If a man, instead of recognizing the value of virtue, devotes his attention only to appearances... in serving his parents, he can exert his utmost strength; in serving his prince, he can devote his life; in his intercourse with friends, his words are sincere. Although men say that he has not learned, I will certainly say that he has." (*Xue Er*)[1]5. The "delight" described here refers to a genuine feeling of vitality attained through practicing the principles of human relations. Examining its specific connotation, it entails "embodying benevolence", as Zixia expressed: "Learn broadly and be steadfast in your purpose; inquire earnestly and reflect on things near at hand—benevolence is to be found in this." (*Zizhang*)[1]198 Learning to strengthen one's purpose, earnestly inquiring and reflecting on nearby things, one nurtures the learned principles within one's real life, experiencing the "joy" of benevolent virtue. Just as Shao Yong of the Song Dynasty said, "If learning does not reach the point of joy, it cannot be called learning" (*Guanwu·Waipian*, juan 12)[3]. This practice of virtue is the lifelong goal and belief of the gentleman establishing himself in the world, the so-called "Be sincerely trustworthy and love learning; hold firm to the good Way until death" (*Taibo*)[1]81. The gentleman finds joy in the practice of cultivation and the refinement of his own virtue. No wonder Confucius said, "be insatiable in learning" and "so eager was he in pursuit of learning that he forgot his food, so joyful was he that he forgot his sorrows, and did not notice that old age was coming on" (*Shu Er*)[1]70. Thus, Confucius particularly appreciated his disciple Yan Hui, who could practice this kind of virtuous learning, and deeply regretted his early death: "There was Yan Hui who loved learning... He did not transfer his anger; he did not repeat a fault. Unfortunately, his life was short, and he died. Now there is none... I have not heard of anyone who loves learning." (*Yong Ye*)[1]54. Yan Hui could achieve "not transferring anger, not repeating a fault," truly using learning to nurture virtue.

2.2. Joy in Ritual

Next is joy in ritual. Confucius repeatedly spoke of the important role of "ritual" for a person, saying "If you do not learn ritual, you will have no means to take your stand" (*Jishi*)[1]176 and "If you do not understand ritual, you will have no means to take your stand" (*Yao Yue*)[1]209. On one hand, this certainly contained elements targeting the social requirement for gentlemen in the Spring and Autumn period to "conduct themselves and manage social intercourse with ritual," i.e., Confucius's emphasis on external ceremonial rituals and etiquette, such as "How exquisite the culture of the Zhou Dynasty! I follow the Zhou" (*Bayi*)[1]28 and "When substance prevails over refinement, you have the rustic. When refinement prevails over substance, you have the clerk. Only when substance and refinement are duly blended do you have the gentleman." (*Yong Ye*)[1]60—discussing the role of "ritual" in establishing the gentleman's person from the perspective of the social utility of ceremonial rituals. On the other hand, he placed greater emphasis on the inner cultivation meaning of "ritual," as in the so-called "The rituals, the rituals! Does it mean nothing more than presents of jade and silk? Music, music! Does it mean nothing more than bells and drums?" (*Yang Huo*)[1]183 and "If a man is not benevolent, what has he to do with ritual? If a man is not benevolent, what has he to do with music?" (*Bayi*)[1]24, penetratingly revealing the virtuous "benevolence" behind ritual and music. He also said, "Be stimulated by the *Odes*, take your stand through ritual, and be perfected by music." (*Taibo*)[1]80. Zhu Xi commented on this sentence: "Stimulated means to arise. The *Odes* are based on human nature and emotions, containing both deviant and correct elements. Their words are easy to understand, and in the process of reciting and singing them, with modulation and repetition, they easily move people. Therefore, at the beginning of learning, that which stimulates the heart to love good and hate evil, and cannot be stopped,

must be found here. Taking reverence, respect, deference, and humility as the foundation, and having detailed rules and measures, can solidify the meeting of skin and flesh, the binding of sinews and bones. Therefore, in the middle stage of learning, that which enables one to stand firm and not be shaken by external things, must be found here. Music has the five notes and twelve pitches, singing alternately and harmonizing, forming the essence of songs, dances, and the eight sounds. It can nurture human nature and emotions, wash away depravity and filth, and dissolve impurities. Therefore, at the final stage of learning, that which leads to the refinement of righteousness and the maturity of benevolence, and naturally harmonizes and follows morality, must be found here. This is the completion of learning." [2]105. Zhu Xi saw "Odes, ritual, music" as a complete sequence for gentlemanly cultivation: first, the "Odes" stimulate the heart's "love for good and hatred of evil," germinating the virtuous cognition of good and evil; then, "ritual" solidifies the meeting of skin and flesh, the binding of sinews and bones, enabling one "not to be shaken by external things," completing the crucial link in practicing virtue—self-restraint; finally, "music" completes "nurturing human nature and emotions, washing away depravity and filth, dissolving impurities," ultimately making one "harmonize and follow morality." It is evident that ritual, as a key link in cultivation, plays an important "person-establishing" role when dealing with external things. This is also what Confucius meant by "The gentleman, who studies culture broadly and restrains himself with ritual, will surely not transgress!" (*Yong Ye*) [1]62. "Ritual" has the significant meaning of self-restraint, ensuring that one's inner virtuous cultivation is not diminished. The *Taibo* chapter speaks of the importance of "ritual" for self-cultivation: "Respectfulness without ritual becomes laborious bustle; carefulness without ritual becomes timidity; boldness without ritual becomes insubordination; straightforwardness without ritual becomes rudeness." (*Taibo*) [1]77, exhaustively stating ritual's effect of maintaining the mean and correctness of human virtue. The so-called "If you are respectful and close to ritual, you will stay far from shame and disgrace." (*Xue Er*) [1]8. The passage where Yan Yuan asks about benevolence further reveals the meaning of "ritual" in virtuous cultivation:

Yan Yuan asked about benevolence. The Master said, "To return to the observance of the rites through overcoming oneself constitutes benevolence. If for a single day a man could return to the observance of the rites through overcoming himself, the whole world would consider benevolence to be his. However, the practice of benevolence depends on oneself alone, and not on others." Yan Yuan said, "I ask for the detailed items." The Master said, "Do not look at what is contrary to ritual; do not listen to what is contrary to ritual; do not speak what is contrary to ritual; do not make a movement which is contrary to ritual." Yan Yuan said, "Though I am not quick, I ask to act according to these words." (*Yan Yuan*) [1]121

Confucius told Yan Yuan that the method for "benevolence" lies in making "looking, listening, speaking, acting" all take "ritual" as the guiding standard, i.e., "overcoming oneself and returning to ritual". "Returning to ritual" involves self-restraint and cultivation, not constraint by external others. Although "ritual" is an external pattern, it is also the standard method by which the gentleman practices self-cultivation. The *Jishi* chapter says: "There are three kinds of beneficial joy and three kinds of harmful joy. Finding joy in regulating oneself with ritual and music, finding joy in speaking of the goodness of others, and finding joy in having many worthy friends—these are beneficial. Finding joy in extravagant pleasures, finding joy in idle wandering, finding joy in lavish feasting—these are harmful." [1]174. Here, "finding joy in regulating ritual and music" among the "three beneficial joys" was annotated by Dai Zhen of the Qing Dynasty: "jie means to stop. Ritual cultivates the exterior, music stops the interior; knowing where to stop, one is neither presumptuous nor excessive!" [4]1478. It is evident that Confucius believed one should find "joy" in "regulating with ritual and music." That is, using institutions, ritual, and music to regulate one's speech, actions, conduct, and interactions with things and friends is also a form of joy. Confucius often spoke of "ritual" in connection with

"music," and among music, he particularly liked the *Shao* music, praising it highly: "It is perfectly beautiful and also perfectly good." (*Bayi*)[1]33. The "ritual" and "music" spoken of by Confucius are both necessary conditions for the gentleman to achieve benevolence; music and ritual nourish people's character, making them gentlemen, in a subtle, silent way. Although ritual and music systems are not immutable and must change according to specific circumstances, consistently regulating and restraining one's words and actions with ritual and music, and enjoying this process of regulation, just like Confucius himself, who always acted according to ritual, used ritual for self-correction, and amidst complex changing circumstances, found joy in it.

2.3. Joy in Poverty

Finally, joy in poverty. Although Confucius had the ideal of governing the world by promoting Zhou rituals, facing the reality of a bumpy official career, he also expressed the helpless sigh: "If the Way does not prevail, I shall set forth a raft upon the sea." (*Gongye Chang*)[1]43. A gentleman establishing himself in the world finds success, failure, wealth, and honor uncertain; the times and fate cannot be forced. Only the cultivation of one's own virtue can be pursued with full effort. Confucius's "The gentleman seeks neither a full belly nor a comfortable home. He is quick in action but cautious in speech. He goes to men who possess the Way to correct himself" (*Xue Er*)[1]9 is precisely an inner adherence to the correct Way, not pursuing external food and warmth or comfortable dwellings, not currying favor with the vulgar world, not changing or shifting due to external worldly circumstances. The so-called "Be sincerely trustworthy and love learning; hold firm to the good Way until death... When the Way prevails in the world, appear; when the Way is absent, hide. When the Way prevails in the state, to be poor and obscure is a disgrace; when the Way is absent in the state, to be rich and honored is a disgrace." (*Taibo*)[1]81. Facing the world with the correct Way, holding firm to the good Way until death—if the state lacks the Way and one seeks wealth and honor, it is a shameful thing. In fact, regarding the path to wealth and honor, Confucius was not entirely dismissive. He once said: "If wealth were a permissible pursuit, I would be willing even to act as a guard holding a whip. But since it is not, I follow what I love." (*Shu Er*)[1]68. He merely believed that if wealth were "permissible to pursue," he would be willing even to be a carriage driver. However, if it violated his moral principles as a gentleman, then such wealth was clearly "not permissible to pursue," and it would be better to follow his own ideals and loves. A classic passage in the *Liren* chapter fully embodies Confucius's adherence to the virtue of "benevolence" and its relationship with wealth, honor, poverty, and low status: "Wealth and honor are what men desire; but if they are obtained by deviating from the Way, they must not be kept. Poverty and low status are what men dislike; but if they can be avoided only by deviating from the Way, they must not be avoided. If the gentleman abandons benevolence, how can he merit the name? The gentleman does not, even for the space of a single meal, act contrary to benevolence. In moments of haste, he cleaves to it. In seasons of danger, he cleaves to it." (*Liren*)[1]35. Zigong once discussed the pursuit of people regarding the disparity between rich and poor with Confucius, believing that "being poor without being obsequious, being rich without being arrogant" could serve as a model for gentlemen. Confucius said: "That may suffice, but it is not as good as being poor yet joyful, and rich yet loving ritual." (*Xue Er*)[1]9. He also said: "To be poor without resentment is difficult; to be rich without arrogance is easy." (*Xian Wen*)[1]147. He believed "being rich without arrogance is easy," but "being poor without resentment is difficult," and further elevated "being poor yet joyful" as a higher-level spiritual pursuit. Confucius once said of himself: "With coarse rice to eat, with water to drink, and my bended arm for a pillow—I still have joy in the midst of these things. Riches and honors acquired by unrighteousness are to me as a floating cloud." (*Shu Er*)[1]69. He was indifferent to external poverty, instead finding joy within it, gladly accepting it as sweet, able to uphold his own moral principles without coveting wealth and honor, viewing them as floating clouds. This inner moral

steadfastness is particularly valuable in life's difficulties. For example, Confucius and his disciples were "reduced to extreme distress in Chen... his followers, being ill, were unable to rise. Zilu, with evident dissatisfaction, said, 'Has the gentleman likewise to endure poverty?' The Master said, 'The gentleman endures poverty steadfastly. The small man, when poor, becomes reckless.'" (*Weiling Gong*)[1]159. Among Confucius's disciples, Yan Hui precisely met Confucius's moral expectations. He praised him: "Admirable indeed was the virtue of Hui! With a single bamboo dish of rice, a single gourd dish of drink, and living in his mean narrow lane, while others could not have endured the distress, he did not allow his joy to be affected. Admirable indeed was the virtue of Hui!" (*Yong Ye*)[1]58. Yan Hui, with his simple food and drink, living in a humble alley yet not changing his joy, possessed a self-assured pursuit in life, not anxiously seeking wealth and honor, not grieving over fame and reputation, able to "study culture broadly and restrain himself with ritual," it can be said he deeply grasped the essence of Confucius's heart-mind cultivation. No wonder when Yan Hui died young, Confucius cried out in pain, "Heaven is destroying me! Heaven is destroying me!" (*Xian Jin*)[1]111. This inner moral steadfastness of Confucius and Yan Hui lies in their life realization that "The virtuous cannot dwell with those who are not benevolent; they cannot long dwell in straitened circumstances, nor can they long dwell in joyfulness." (*Liren*)[1]34. Positively speaking, it can be attributed to the moral integrity encapsulated in the phrases: "The gentleman plans for the Way, not for a livelihood" and "The gentleman is concerned about the Way, not about poverty." (*Weiling Gong*)[1]166.

3. The Joy of Conduct

If the "joy of cultivation" represents the "inner sageliness" connotation of early Confucianism, then "outer kingliness" is mainly reflected in the aspects of the joy of conduct in the *Analects*, with its specific connotations manifested in the joy of friends, the joy of filial piety, and the joy of office.

3.1. Joy of Friends

The first is the joy found in friendship. The opening chapter of the *Analects* · Xue Er states: "Is it not delightful to have friends coming from distant quarters?" (Xue Er 1.1)[1]1 Here, it is noted that the old Lu version of the *Analects* used the character friend in place of have. Xing Bing, in his commentary, quotes Zheng Xuan's annotation: "Those who share the same teacher are 'péng' (companions); those who share the same purpose are 'yǒu' (friends)."[4]24 Zhu Xi quotes Cheng Yi's saying: "Taking goodness to others, and having many who believe and follow, therefore it is joyful"[2]47 to explain this sentence. Synthesizing various annotations, the joy of friendship lies in the mutual discussion and belief among fellow disciples regarding the good Way and learning, the mutual advancement in virtue and cultivation, the so-called "Finding joy in having many worthy friends is beneficial" (*Jishi*)[1]174. As Zengzi said: "The gentleman by means of culture gathers friends; by means of friends he assists his benevolence." (*Yan Yuan*)[1]130. Through the exchange of learning in friendship, it assists the cultivation of one's own benevolent virtue. Zigong once asked Confucius about practicing benevolence. The Master said: "The craftsman who wishes to do his work well must first sharpen his tools... Befriend those officers who are benevolent." (*Weiling Gong*)[1]161. Making friends with "officers who are benevolent" has significant propelling significance for the cultivation and practice of one's own "benevolent" virtue. Therefore, one must first be serious and respectful in this matter, learn to nurture virtue, and take loyalty and faithfulness as the foundation. The so-called "If the gentleman is not grave, he will not inspire awe; if he learns, he will not be narrow-minded. Make loyalty and faithfulness your chief principles. Have no friends not equal to yourself. When you have faults, do not fear to abandon them." (*Xue Er*)[1]6. Adopting an attitude of loyalty and sincerity, one should broadly absorb the strengths of friends, courageously correct one's own

faults, and thereby achieve the ideal expressed in the phrase: "When I walk along with two others, they may serve me as my teachers. I will select their good qualities and follow them, their bad qualities and avoid them." (Shu Er)[1]71. Zengzi once said: "Every day I examine myself on three points:... in intercourse with friends, whether I have been unfaithful?" (Xue Er)[1]3, taking "loyalty and faithfulness" as an important standard for friendship. And Zixia also said: "In intercourse with friends, be faithful to your word." (Xue Er)[1]5. Confucius also said: "(My wish is that) friends trust me" (Gongye Chang)[1]51. It is evident that the "loyalty and faithfulness" of friendship is an important part of Confucian thought and a key to its "inner sageliness" cultivation. On the other hand, making friends also requires discernment regarding the object and principles of friendship—a quality that embodies the concept of "outer kingliness". The Master said: "There are three kinds of beneficial friends and three kinds of harmful friends. To make friends with the upright, with the trustworthy, and with the well-informed is beneficial. To make friends with the ingratiating, with the insincere, and with the glib-tongued is harmful." (Jishi)[1]173. A gentleman in making friends should choose the virtuous aspects of friends, i.e., uprightness, trustworthiness, and broad learning; and avoid the non-virtuous aspects, i.e., flattery, superficial compliance, and boastfulness. One should take the good Way as the standard for one's own cultivation, consciously resisting and dealing with the unworthy aspects of external friends. For those unworthy aspects in friends, one should sincerely exhort and encourage them to correct existing problems, the so-called "Friends should admonish each other earnestly and encourage each other kindly" (Zilu)[1]141. Zhu Xi quotes Hu Anguo's annotation: "Earnestly means sincere and thorough. Kindly means detailed and encouraging." [2]149, pointing out the principles of interaction between friends. He also said, "Faithfully admonish your friend, and skillfully guide him. If he does not listen, stop. Do not bring shame upon yourself." (Yan Yuan)[1]130. "To be importunate with friends will lead to estrangement." (Liren)[1]40. If a friend does not accept advice, one should not further incur disgrace, otherwise one will only suffer the friend's alienation and dislike. This clearly reflects the worldly application aspect of Confucianism and provides a set of flexible principles for the "joy" of friendship.

3.2. Joy of Filial Piety

Next is the joy of filial piety. Although the "joy" of filial piety is not directly stated in the *Analects*, its cultivation mindset of "embodying benevolence and finding joy" is directly related to the connotation of filial piety. Youzi said: "A man who is filial and fraternal is seldom fond of opposing superiors; and those who are not fond of opposing superiors never proceed to disorder. The gentleman applies himself to the roots. Once the roots are established, the Way will grow. Filial piety and fraternal duty—are they not the root of benevolence?" (Xue Er)[1]2. As a member of a patriarchal society, the primary task for a person establishing themselves in the world is to handle human relations well with family and clan. The concept of "filial piety and fraternal duty" (xiào tì) represents a blood-based ethical obligation within human relationships. Regarded as the root of benevolent virtue, it also constitutes the path through which a gentleman establishes his character. It is for this reason that Confucianism places such high importance on filial piety and fraternal respect. Once, when Zai Wo questioned Confucius about the three-year mourning period for one's parents, Confucius responded by asking whether Zai Wo would "feel at ease" without observing the full mourning rites. Zai Wo replied that he did, so Confucius criticized him: "This shows Yu's (Zai Wo's) lack of benevolence. A child is completely dependent on the care of his parents for the first three years of his life. The three years' mourning is the universal mourning everywhere under heaven. And did Yu not receive three years' love from his parents?" [1]186. Confucius believed that Zai Wo, being at ease with "eating fine rice and wearing embroidered clothes" before the three-year mourning period was complete, lacked the piety a gentleman should have in observing mourning rites—"finding no sweetness in food, no pleasure in music, no comfort in his dwelling"—and therefore

reprimanded Zai Wo for being "not benevolent." He believed a gentleman should "in serving his parents, exert his utmost strength" (*Xue Er*)[1]5, performing filial duties according to ritual. When Meng Yizi asked about filial piety, Confucius said, "Do not disobey!... When alive, serve them according to ritual; when dead, bury them according to ritual, sacrifice to them according to ritual." (*Weizheng*)[1]13. Both before and after their death, parents must be treated strictly according to the standard of "ritual." Of course, this standard of "ritual" does not solely focus on extravagant ceremonial forms, but rather emphasizes the sincere and natural expression of piety and grief within. "Men never become fully revealed as themselves except in mourning for a parent!" (*Zizhang*)[1]200. "In ritual, rather than extravagance, better frugality; in mourning, rather than ease, better grief" (*Bayi*). Compared to external forms, Confucius paid more attention to the sincerity and reverence of the emotion behind the ritual. "Nowadays 'filial' means merely being able to provide for one's parents. But even dogs and horses are provided for. Without reverence, what is the difference?" (*Weizheng*)[1]14. He also said: "The difficult part is the expression on one's face. If merely when there is work to be done, the young shoulder the burden, and when wine and food are served, the elders are given precedence, can this be considered filial piety?" (*Weizheng*)[1]15. If filial piety remains only at the level of basic support and daily care, it is clearly not true "filial" piety. Therefore, Confucius held in high esteem a form of filial piety that honors the thoughts of ancestors and carries forward their aspirations—exemplified by Zengzi's exclamation in the Analects: "Look at my feet! Look at my hands!" (*Taibo*) [1]78—a sentiment reflecting deep attachment to one's parents and an unwillingness to harm the body they bestowed. Another example is the filial piety of continuing the father's way: "When his father is alive, observe his intentions; when his father is dead, observe his conduct. If for three years he does not alter from the way of his father, he may be called filial." (*Xue Er*)[1]7. Sincere filial piety in its concrete manifestation often appears through a mentality of "worry," "fear," and "without resentment," the so-called "(The filial son) is concerned only about his parents' illnesses" (*Weizheng*)[1]14; "The years of one's parents cannot be forgotten. On the one hand, they are a source of joy; on the other, of fear." (*Liren*)[1]39; "In serving his parents, a son may gently remonstrate with them. When he sees that they are not inclined to follow his advice, he should yet remain respectful and not oppose them. He may be anxious but not resentful." (*Liren*)[1]38. This practice of filial piety through personal action, using one's own feelings to understand the parents' mental and psychological state, can be called the ultimate of "filial piety." Regarding this, Zengzi, as a model of "filial" virtue, once discussed "filial piety" saying: "Benevolence is to benevolence this; ritual is to practice this; righteousness is to right this; faithfulness is to be faithful to this; strength is to be strong in this. "Joy naturally arises from following this; punishments naturally arise from opposing this." (Book of Rites · Meaning of Sacrifices / *Jiyi*)[5]914, which precisely serves as an annotation to the "joy of filial piety" discussed here.

3.3. Joy of Office

Finally, the joy of office. Mencius once quoted an ancient text: "If Confucius was three months without a prince (to serve), he was anxious and apprehensive. When he left a state, he invariably carried with him presents for the ruler of the next." (*Teng Wen Gong·Xia*)[6]130. It is evident that holding office was extremely important to Confucius; three months without a prince caused inner anxiety. Confucius himself said, "If there were any who would employ me, in the course of twelve months I should have done something considerable. In three years the government would be perfected." (*Zilu*)[1]135, showing full confidence in his own political ability. Therefore, Confucius traveled around various states seeking an enlightened ruler to allow him to implement the government of Zhou rituals to save the world from political disorder. Confucius indeed had great political enthusiasm for entering office and serving. This is fully evident from the two instances of his seeking to meet Nanzi and accepting the summons of Bi Xi:

The Master went to see Nanzi. Zilu was displeased. The Master swore, saying, "If I have done anything wrong, may Heaven reject me! May Heaven reject me!" (*Yong Ye*)[1]63

Bi Xi summoned (the Master), and he was inclined to go. Zilu said, "Master, I have heard you say, 'When a man in his own person is guilty of doing evil, a gentleman will not associate with him.' Bi Xi is in rebellion, holding Zhongmou. If you go to him, what shall be said?" The Master said, "Yes, I did say that. But is it not said that if a thing is really hard, it cannot be worn thin; if it is really white, it cannot be blackened? Am I a bitter gourd? How can I be hung up without being eaten?" (*Yang Huo*)[1]181

Confucius once visited Nanzi, the wife of Duke Ling of Wei, who was known for her questionable reputation. For Confucius, who emphasized moral cultivation, this association posed certain difficulties, which led Zilu to express strong dissatisfaction and question the propriety of Confucius's action. Anxious to defend his integrity, Confucius swore urgently: "If I have done anything improper, may Heaven forsake me! May Heaven forsake me!"

On another occasion, Bi Xi, a retainer of Zhao Jianzi, occupied Zhongmou and rebelled against his lord in opposition to Zhao Jianzi. Thus, when Confucius considered joining Bi Xi, Zilu objected, saying: "When a man is personally involved in wrongdoing, a gentleman does not associate with him." In response, Confucius explained that he was capable of maintaining his personal purity and moral steadfastness—that he "could not be worn thin" and "could not be blackened." He argued, "How can I be like a bitter gourd—only hung up but never eaten?" His words indicated that accepting the official post was a move made out of necessity rather than choice. This mindset of seeking the Way through office is even more apparent in the section with Chang Ju and Jie Ni:

Chang Ju and Jie Ni were ploughing together in the fields. Confucius passed by them and sent Zilu to ask about the ford. Chang Ju said, "Who is he that holds the reins in the carriage there?" Zilu said, "It is Kong Qiu." "Is it not Kong Qiu of Lu?" "It is," said he. "Then he knows the ford already." Zilu then asked Jie Ni. Jie Ni said, "Who are you, sir?" He answered, "I am Zhong You." "Are you not the disciple of Kong Qiu of Lu?" "I am." (Jie Ni) said, "Disorder, like a swelling flood, spreads everywhere under heaven. Who can change it? Rather than follow a scholar who avoids one man and then another, would it not be better to follow those who avoid the world altogether?" And with this he went on covering the seed without stopping. Zilu went and reported their remarks. The Master said with a sigh, "It is impossible to associate with birds and beasts. If I do not associate with mankind, with whom shall I associate? If the Way prevailed in the world, I would not try to change it." (*Weizi*)[1]192

The hermits Chang Ju and Jie Ni criticized Confucius for his eagerness to change the world. Confucius sighed, "It is impossible to associate with birds and beasts. If I do not associate with mankind, with whom shall I associate?" showing his great perseverance in wanting to rectify the world and uphold his political ideals. This also deeply influenced Zilu. Therefore, when the old man carrying a basket mocked Confucius for "not using his four limbs, not distinguishing the five grains" and not being able to withdraw from the world and live in seclusion, Zilu commented on him: "Not to take office is not righteous. The duties between old and young cannot be neglected; how can the duty between prince and minister be set aside? Wishing to maintain his personal purity, he subverts the great relationships of society. The gentleman's taking office is to do his duty. As for the failure of the Way, he is aware of that already." (*Weizi*)[1]193. It is evident that Confucius's entering office was for the sake of promoting human ethical principles in the world and realizing the ideal order of ritual government: "When the Way prevails in the world, the rites, music, and punitive expeditions proceed from the Son of Heaven. When the Way does not prevail in the world, the rites, music, and punitive expeditions proceed from the feudal lords... When the Way prevails in the world, policy does not rest with the high ministers. When the Way prevails in the world, the common people do not criticize." (*Jishi*)[1]172. Zilu once asked Confucius about governance: "If the prince of Wei

were to employ you to administer his government, what would be your first measure?" The Master said, "It would certainly be to rectify names." Zilu said, "Is that so? What simplicity! Why rectify them?" The Master said, "How uncultivated you are, You! A gentleman, in regard to what he does not know, shows a cautious reserve. If names are not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things. If language is not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success. When affairs cannot be carried on to success, rites and music will not flourish. When rites and music do not flourish, punishments will not be properly awarded. When punishments are not properly awarded, the people do not know how to move hand or foot. Therefore, the gentleman only needs to have his words correspond to their objects, and his actions necessarily correspond to his words. The gentleman is simply never careless in his words." (*Zilu*)[1]131. At the heart of Confucius's philosophy of governance was the principle of "rectifying names"—that is, ensuring a correspondence between names and realities in terms of the roles and duties of rulers and ministers, as well as the alignment between an individual's status and their corresponding responsibilities. For example, Duke Jing of Qi asked Confucius about government. Confucius replied, "Let the ruler be a ruler, the minister a minister, the father a father, the son a son." The duke said, "Excellent! Indeed, if the ruler is not a ruler, the minister not a minister, the father not a father, the son not a son, although I have revenue, can I enjoy it?" (*Yan Yuan*)[1]126. Here, Confucius originally spoke from the perspective of the equivalence of each person's status and corresponding duties. Unexpectedly, Duke Jing of Qi, from a political order based on self-interest, focused on the effect on his own "revenue enjoyment." In fact, Confucius believed there should be corresponding ritual rules between ruler and minister: "The prince employs his minister according to ritual; the minister serves his prince with loyalty." (*Bayi*)[1]30. The ruler ought to be mindful of the difficulties his ministers face and be cautious in his own words and deeds. For example, Duke Ding of Lu asked: "Is there a single saying that can cause a country to prosper?" Confucius replied, "A saying cannot have such an effect... There is a saying amongst men: 'It is difficult to be a prince, and not easy to be a minister.' If a prince knows the difficulty of being a prince, does this not almost amount to a single saying causing a country to prosper?" (The Duke) said, "Is there a single saying that can cause a country to perish?" Confucius replied, "A saying cannot have such an effect... There is a saying amongst men: 'I have no pleasure in being a prince, except that no one opposes my sayings.' If his sayings are good and no one opposes them, good. But if his sayings are not good and no one opposes them, does that not almost amount to a single saying causing a country to perish?" (*Zilu*)[1]136. The ruler's word can prosper or ruin a state; the key lies in whether he can fulfill his duties responsibly and not exercise power willfully. "He who governs by virtue is like the polestar, which remains in its place while all the other stars revolve around it." (*Weizheng*)[1]11. As for ministers, they also need to be dignified in ritual and serve the ruler respectfully and carefully: "At court in the ancestral temple, he was fluent in speech, though cautious." (*Xiangdang*)[1]96. "When the prince was present, his manner was respectful and uneasy, yet composed." (*Xiangdang*)[1]96. "When the prince sent him a gift of cooked food, he would straighten his mat and be the first to taste it. When the prince sent him a gift of uncooked meat, he would have it cooked and offer it to the ancestors. When the prince sent him a live animal, he would keep it alive. When attending the prince at a meal, he would taste the offerings first when the prince made the offering." (*Xiangdang*)[1]104. And they should address the ruler's urgent needs promptly: "When the prince summoned him, he would go without waiting for the carriage to be yoked." (*Xiangdang*)[1]10. In governing the people, one must show sympathy for the sufferings of the common folk and refrain from imposing corvée labor too readily. As advised in the *Analects*: "Be respectful in the discharge of duties and faithful; be economical in expenditure and love the people; employ them only at the proper seasons." (*Xue Er*)[1]4 One should not use punishments and executions to intimidate the people, emphasizing transforming the people through virtue. For example, Ji Kangzi asked Confucius about

government, saying, "What do you think about killing the unprincipled for the good of the principled?" Confucius replied, "Sir, in carrying on your government, why should you use killing at all? Let your evinced desires be for what is good, and the people will be good. The relation between superiors and inferiors is like that between the wind and the grass. The grass must bend when the wind blows across it." (*Yan Yuan*)[1]127. And ultimately, guide the people with virtue and regulate them through ritual, so that they will develop a sense of shame and correct themselves. In this way, ruler and people become united in heart and purpose, thereby realizing what Mencius called "the king sharing joy with the people." [6]12

4. The Joy of Attainment

When discussing the realm of sages and worthies in the *Analects*, the most poetic passage is undoubtedly the chapter "Attending upon Confucius" (*Shi Zuo*) in the *Xian Jin* chapter, where Confucius asks his disciples about their aspirations. The dialogue with Zeng Xi (Zeng Dian) is particularly noteworthy:

"(Dian), what are your wishes?" The music of Zeng Dian's lute died away. With a final twang he laid it aside, rose, and replied, "My wishes differ from those of the other three." The Master said, "What harm is there in that? Each may speak his mind." (Dian) said, "In late spring, when the spring clothes have been made, I would like, accompanied by five or six capped youths and six or seven boys, to bathe in the Yi River, enjoy the breeze among the rain altars (*Wuyu*), and return home singing." The Master sighed deeply and said, "I am with Dian!" [1]118

This description is poetic and picturesque, extraordinary in spirit and demeanor, carrying an aura of the sage—concealed yet vividly present—soaring in its inner logic and vitality, and rich in atmosphere. Zhu Xi greatly admired this, commenting: "The learning of Zeng Dian seems to have reached the point where human desires are exhausted and Heavenly principle flows forth, filling everywhere without the slightest deficiency. Therefore, in his moments of activity and tranquility, he is so composed. And his speaking of his aspiration is nothing more than, according to his position, finding joy in the common practices of daily life. Initially, there is no intention to abandon himself for others, yet his mind is serene and free, directly flowing together with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things above and below, each attaining its proper wonder, subtly revealing itself beyond words. Compared to the other three, who were confined to the minor details of affairs, his demeanor was naturally not the same." (Collected Commentaries on the Four Books)[2]131-132. Zeng Dian was Zeng Xi; although he is not frequently mentioned in the *Analects*, his thought can largely be glimpsed through his son, Zeng Shen (Zengzi). Zengzi's thought is mainly embodied in two aspects: one is the pursuit of "benevolent" virtue in "The scholar may not be without breadth of mind and vigorous endurance... taking benevolence as his burden" (*Taibo*)[1]79, emphasizing the gentleman's entering office with the sturdy virtue of "one to whom an orphan of six or seven *chi* may be entrusted, one to whom the fate of a state of a hundred *li* may be committed, and who, confronted with a major crisis, does not lose his integrity" (*Taibo*)[1]79. On the other hand, it permeates Confucius's thought with the way of "conscientiousness and reciprocity", emphasizing self-cultivation through "introspection" and "careful attention to one's conduct." These two dimensions correspond precisely to the Confucian ideal of "inner sageliness and outer kingliness". This is what Confucius summarized as the three attributes of the gentleman's way:

"The benevolent are free from anxiety; the wise are free from perplexity; the courageous are free from fear" (*Xian Wen* 14.28)[1]153—a personality realm that may be described as the "aura of the sage and worthy".

Below is an analysis of these three virtues articulated by Confucius—fearless benevolence, unperplexed wisdom, and dauntless courage—to explore how each embodies, in ideological

terms, the unity of “inner sageliness and outer kingliness,” that is, the outer expression of an inner spiritual state. In other words, “the benevolent are free from anxiety; the wise are free from perplexity; the courageous are free from fear” represents a condition of attained “joy” that is both composed and sincere, profound and vast—permeating both the real-world engagement and the spiritual steadfastness of the gentleman’s character.

4.1. Benevolence

First is “benevolence.” Sima Niu also asked Confucius, “What is meant by a gentleman?” The Master said, “A gentleman is free from anxiety and fear.” (Niu) said, “Free from anxiety and fear! Does this constitute a gentleman?” The Master said, “When internal examination finds nothing wrong, what is there to be anxious about, what is there to fear?” (*Yan Yuan*)[1]122. It is evident that the benevolent person often emphasizes introspection, acts cautiously and respectfully, and holds firmly to the good Way, hence can be “free from anxiety.” This corresponds precisely to Zengzi’s emphasis on introspection in “examining myself three times daily.” On the other hand, benevolent virtue also has obvious outer kingliness qualities. For example, Zhong Gong asked about benevolence. The Master said, “When abroad, behave as though you were receiving an important guest; employ the people as though you were assisting at a great sacrifice. Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.” (*Yan Yuan*)[1]121. When abroad facing the people, one must not be frivolous; employing the people should be like a grand sacrifice, not undertaken lightly. One must fully understand the people’s sufferings, put oneself in their place, and not impose on others what one does not desire oneself. Also, “The people’s need for benevolence is more urgent than their need for water and fire. I have seen men die from treading on water and fire, but I have never seen a man die from treading the course of benevolence.” (*Weiling Gong*)[1]167. The people need water and fire for life, and when the gentleman treads the path of benevolent government, the people will certainly rejoice in their ruler. Furthermore, Zigong said, “If a man extensively confers benefits on the people and can assist all, what would you say of him? Might he be called benevolent?” The Master said, “Why stop at benevolence? He would undoubtedly be a sage! Even Yao and Shun would find this difficult. As for the benevolent man, he, wishing to be established himself, seeks to establish others; wishing to be successful himself, seeks to succeed others. The ability to take what is near at hand as an example may be called the method of benevolence.” (*Yong Ye*)[1]64. The benevolent person establishes others and helps them succeed, extensively conferring benefits on the people and assisting all, even enough to be called “sage”! It is evident that the connotation of “benevolence” is profound. In inner sageliness, it possesses the anxiety-free state of “finding nothing wrong upon internal examination”; in outer kingliness, it possesses the vast demeanor of nurturing, aiding, and enabling the people.

4.2. Wisdom

Next is “wisdom.” Regarding “wisdom,” Confucius once divided people into four types: “Those who are born with knowledge are the highest. Those who learn and thereby acquire knowledge are next. Those who learn through difficulty are next again. Those who encounter difficulty yet do not learn—these are the lowest of the people.” (*Jishi*)[1]175. But he said of himself, “Quick and eager to learn; not ashamed to ask questions of his inferiors” (*Gongye Chang*)[1]46; “I am not one who was born with knowledge; I am one who loves the past and is diligent in seeking it.” (*Shu Er*)[1]70; “To silently comprehend, to learn without satiety, to teach others without weariness—what have I done to deserve these?” (*Shu Er*)[1]65. This fully demonstrates Confucius’s dedication to learning. He recognized the importance of learning for individual virtuous cultivation, as in: “To love benevolence without loving learning is liable to lead to foolishness. To love wisdom without loving learning is liable to lead to deviation. To love faithfulness without loving learning is liable to lead to heartless rigidity. To love uprightness without loving learning is liable to lead to intolerance. To love courage without loving learning

is liable to lead to disorder. To love firmness without loving learning is liable to lead to rashness." (*Yang Huo*)[1]182. If a person does not value learning, then even if they have the good qualities of "benevolence, wisdom, faithfulness, uprightness, courage, firmness," they will sink into the petty state of "foolishness, deviation, heartless rigidity, intolerance, disorder, rashness." The key to learning lies in whether it can perfect one's own virtue. Confucius regarded this as the most worrisome matter: "Failure to cultivate virtue, failure to delve into learning, inability to move towards righteousness upon hearing it, inability to correct faults—these are what I worry about." (*Shu Er*)[1]66. He was not concerned about others not knowing him: "I am not concerned that others do not know me; I am concerned that I lack ability." (*Xian Wen*)[1]153. In knowing people and dealing with things, he aimed to avoid losing words or people: "You can speak with a person, yet not speak with him—this is to lose the person. You cannot speak with a person, yet speak with him—this is to lose your words. The wise do not lose people, nor do they lose words." (*Weiling Gong*)[1]161. And he was able to hold fast with benevolence and treat the people with ritual: "Wisdom may attain it, but if benevolence cannot keep it, even though attained, it will be lost. Wisdom may attain it, and benevolence can keep it, but if not presided over with dignity, the people will not be reverent. Wisdom may attain it, benevolence can keep it, and presided over with dignity, yet if not activated according to ritual, it is still not good." (*Weiling Gong*)[1]167. In this regard, the fact that Fan Chi twice asked Confucius about wisdom clearly reflects the characteristics of "outer kingliness" in governing the people. The first time, Confucius answered: "To devote oneself to what is appropriate for the people, and to respect the ghosts and spirits while keeping them at a distance—this may be called wisdom." (*Yong Ye*)[1]60, i.e., guiding the people to engage in the cultivation of righteousness, respecting ghosts and spirits without blindly following superstitious matters. The second time Fan Chi asked about wisdom, the Master said, "Knowing people." Fan Chi did not understand. The Master said, "Raise the straight and set them above the crooked; this can make the crooked straight." Fan Chi retired and saw Zixia, saying, "Just now, I saw the Master and asked about wisdom. He said, 'Raise the straight and set them above the crooked; this can make the crooked straight.' What did he mean?" Zixia said, "Rich is the meaning of these words! When Shun possessed the empire, he selected from among the multitude and raised Gao Yao to office—and those who were not benevolent were kept far away. When Tang possessed the empire, he selected from among the multitude and raised Yi Yin to office—and those who were not benevolent were kept far away." (*Yan Yuan*)[1]129. Zixia used "Shun raising Gao Yao, Tang selecting Yi Yin" to explain to Fan Chi Confucius's "Raise the straight and set them above the crooked; this can make the crooked straight." It is evident that the meaning of "wisdom" also encompasses the concept of benevolent governance, which involves the ruler selecting the worthy and employing the capable, and guiding the people toward moral transformation. In summary, "wisdom" possesses, for inner sageliness, the personal qualities of "loving learning and diligent seeking" and "being lenient towards others"; for outer kingliness, it possesses the wise demeanor of "guiding the people to be practical" and "raising the worthy and employing the capable."

4.3. Courage

Finally, "courage." Confucius often spoke of "courage" with some restraint. He once praised Zilu for his "courage," saying: "You (Zilu) are more courageous than I, but there is nowhere to get the timber (to make a raft)." (*Gongye Chang*)[1]43. Although granting "courage" to Zilu, there was still some criticism. Also, Zilu said, "Does the gentleman esteem courage?" The Master said, "The gentleman holds righteousness to be of highest importance. A gentleman who has courage but lacks righteousness will be turbulent; a small man who has courage but lacks righteousness will become a robber." (*Yang Huo*)[1]188, clearly placing the character "righteousness" above "courage." Otherwise, it leads to turbulence or robbery. But he also acknowledged that "To see what is right and not to do it is want of courage." (*Weizheng*)[1]22. It is evident that "courage"

has a positive side in implementing "righteousness." He also said, "The benevolent are necessarily courageous; the courageous are not necessarily benevolent." (*Xian Wen*)[1]144. "To be fond of courage while detesting poverty leads to disorder." (*Taibo*)[1]80. If a person lacks "benevolent" virtue, they cannot be content in poverty and delight in the Way. Because they are fond of courage, they will not endure poverty and are highly prone to rebel and create disorder. Therefore, Confucius often warned gentlemen to "hate those who have courage but are devoid of ritual" and "hate those who mistake insolence for courage" (*Yang Huo*)[1]188, needing to use "ritual" to restrain "courage." Of course, once this "courage" is guided by moral principle, it appears upright and magnanimous, and the gentleman's lofty personality can stand firm, such as the sturdy virtue described by Zengzi: "The scholar may not be without breadth of mind and vigorous endurance" (*Taibo*)[1]79 and "one to whom an orphan of six or seven *chi* may be entrusted, one to whom the fate of a state of a hundred *li* may be committed, and who, confronted with a major crisis, does not lose his integrity" (*Taibo*)[1]79. From this, it can be seen that "courage"—with regard to inner sageliness, entails the cultivated moral foundation needed to carry out "righteousness"; and with regard to outer kingliness, it suffices to shoulder the responsibilities of family and state.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the ideological connotation of "joy" in the *Analects* is extremely rich, involving multiple levels: the "joy" of moral cultivation, the "joy" of external conduct, and the "joy" of personality and spiritual attainment. These ideological connotations of "joy" correspond to the essential meaning of the Confucian learning of "inner sageliness and outer kingliness," laying a crucial foundation for the development and interpretation of later thought.

References

- [1] Yang Bojun. Lunyu Yizhu. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2009.
- [2] [Song] Zhu Xi. Sishu Zhangju Jizhu. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2012.
- [3] [Song] Shao Yong, collated by Guo Yu. Shao Yong Ji. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2010: 173.
- [4] Huang Huaixin. Lunyu Huijiao Jishi. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2008.
- [5] Hu Pingsheng, Zhang Meng. Liji Yizhu. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 2017: 712.
- [6] Yang Bojun. Mengzi Yizhu. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1960.