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**“Discourses and Practices of Confucian Friendship in 16<sup>th</sup>-Century Korea”**

The original Confucian school might be described as starting with a group of disciples and friends gathering together around the central figure of a master: Confucius, Master Kong. The man Confucius, as he has been staged in the text of the *Analects*, is always surrounded by a few key figures with distinct personalities, social backgrounds, and trajectories: the practical and straight-talker Zilu with military training, the gifted and politically skilled Zigong coming from a wealthy family, the youngest and favorite disciple Yan Hui from humble origins whose premature death left the Master inconsolable, Zengzi keen on transmitting the supposed true teachings of Confucius and to whom is attributed the *Book of Filial Piety*, etc. All these disciples ask him questions, discuss among themselves, and express their opinions on diverse matters. Without their presence and their questions or reactions, most of the sayings of Confucius would be meaningless, severed from their original dialogical form. The *Analects* has a very special status in the Confucian scriptural tradition indeed, because of its strong formal and stylistic features. These features fully participate in and give shape to how the Confucian “Learning” or the Confucian message presents and *narrates* itself: that is to say through orality and dialogical form, but also through fragmentariness and allusiveness. These features had been partly imitated in the book of Mencius, the *Mengzi*, as well as in the *Fayan* (*Exemplary words*) of Yang Xiong in later periods. The massive compilations of the sayings of Neo-Confucian scholars, like the *Zhuzi yǔlei* recording the discussions between Zhu Xi and his disciples or fellow literati are also illustrations of this strong tendency. Other Confucian texts do not bear as strongly as in the *Analects* this form of dialogues, like the *Xunzi* which resembles more a structured theoretical essay, but they do generally keep the fragmentariness and allusiveness of the original Confucian message, conveying the idea that this message cannot be fully covered, once for all, in simple and simplistic definitions. As for the Confucian Classics, they are also difficult to read and do not present themselves as strongly coherent textual narratives at first sight. So the original Confucian school might be summarized as a master gathering around him disciples who are basically friends with one

another and learning together by their multiple and complex human interactions and through dialogues, questions and answers that are never definitive.

Friendship in Confucianism is not a trivial and secondary issue. It is part of ethics, being one of the “Five Bonds” or “Five Humans Relationships” (prince/minister, father/son, elder brother/younger brother, husband/wife, friend/friend). These Five Bonds are metonymical of all possible human interactions and should not be understood in a very narrow sense. Confucian ethics has been described by some Western scholars (Roger Ames, Henri Rosemont) as “role-ethics,” in the sense that it basically stresses the different roles that any single human being, within a society, has to live in a life-time. The word “role” is to be understood here as a role to be “lived” or “experienced” personally and not simply as a role to be “played” outwardly without any personal commitment. One of the most difficult aspects of Confucianism for a modern audience is certainly its focus on rituals. Yet, it is crucial to understand that rituals are not simple decorum or etiquette coming from exotic old ages, interesting only antiquity lovers. They are not authoritarian and prescriptive rules solely meant to assign rigid tasks and constraints to some segments of society. Contrary to what is sometimes believed, Confucian rites are not meant to be tools of oppression for, as for examples, women, young people, and lower classes in general. I am not saying that Confucianism is an egalitarian ideology, but such a questioning would be somehow anachronistic. Rituals are in fact thought in Confucianism as performative acts meant to truly transform the people who perform different ritual roles in different ritual situations. To understand correctly this point, let me remind you that rituals are fundamentally related to music in Confucianism. An analogy with musical performance is indeed rather enlightening. Performing rituals or having proper ritual behaviors is just like playing and interpreting a score within a musical ensemble. Each performer plays according to his own capacities, talents, and emotions, but he has to be always in tune with the other performers playing their own scores at the same moment. The general score that they are all playing together is not written in advance. Ritual rules might be described as rough sketches, rules and guidelines for that still unwritten score, a score that remains to be played to really exist. The score is in fact created on the spot by the magic of the performance itself, and each musical performance is in that sense unique. Each human interaction is unique and participates at the same time in the common building of a properly human society.

So I would like you to keep in mind four fundamental ideas about Confucian ritualism and role-ethics. Firstly, leading a human life in a Confucian sense means that there are

different roles to be experienced in a life-time: being a subject of a ruler, being a father, a spouse, a brother, a friend, etc. These roles are not fixed once for all, and one single person lives in fact different roles, depending on circumstances of his personal situation. Circumstances are indeed always evolving and changing.

Secondly, the idea of the Five Bonds cannot be understood correctly without taking into account the Golden rule (or the ethics of reciprocity), common to many intellectual and religious traditions and known in Confucianism as the virtue of *shu/sǒ* 恕 (the pictogram of the “heart” topped by the character meaning “reciprocity,” or “similarity,” in the sense of “putting oneself in the place of others”). This golden rule was expressed by Confucius in the *Analects*: “What you do not want others to do to you, do not do to others” (*Analects* 12.2 and 15.24).

Thirdly, Confucian ritualism is intimately connected to the cosmology of the *Book of Changes*, one Confucian Classic. This means that ritualism is not synonymous with rigidity or fixity. On the contrary, it is related to a philosophy that is basically preoccupied with the question: “how to bring and maintain “constancy” in a world regarded as ceaseless changes”? The cosmology of the *Changes* involves in turn different temporalities in ethical practice and points at the tension between “duration” and “moment.” This means that the outward conduct of an exemplary person might change under different circumstances, but his character should remain constant; which implies constant and repeated practice. The state of constant balance that the Confucians seek to achieve is comparable with that of a tightrope walker: it is only when he keeps walking on the rope that he can keep the balance and stay on the rope. So duration, constancy, and active practice are intimately linked one another.

4) Lastly, this long-lasting and repeated ethical practice is precisely what is meant by the word “Learning” (Xue/hak) in Confucianism. Learning is learning to walk on the Confucian Way. The Confucian way expresses the unwillingness to separate theory and practice, but also privilege and responsibility. So there is no distinction between end and means, speech and act. The goal to attain is an everyday “practice,” to be performed until death, a constant walking on the right path. Moreover, this path lies in ordinary life, in “things near at hands,” in daily routines and thus in basic human relationships. The purpose is to live a proper human life and to perform common human destiny according to natural order – or in other words according to natural, cosmological “patterns.”

I am aware that this short and quick overview of Confucian ethics may sound a little difficult to understand, but I hope that things will get a little bit clearer when we will be

reading together the quotations about friendship. So let's now move on to the heart of today's topic.

The notions immediately associated with friendship in Confucian discourses are "Pleasure" and "Joy." This idea appears in the opening sentence of the *Analects* of Confucius:

The Master said: "Studying, and from time to time going over what you've learned – that's enjoyable, isn't it? **To have a friend come from a long way off –that's a pleasure, isn't it?** Others don't understand him, but he doesn't resent it –that's the true gentleman, isn't it?" (*Analects*, 1.1)

The idea also appears in the *Reflections on Things at Hand*, the Neo-Confucian anthology written by Zhu Xi and Lü Zuqian in the 11<sup>th</sup> century that became a primer in Confucian education:


When one's mind, although deeply devoted to the Way, is suddenly distracted by other thoughts, that is because of material force [=vital energy, Qi/Ki]. If one is bound by old habits and cannot free oneself from them, it is after all no good, for then one will merely take delight in those old habits. **The ancients desired to have friends, musical instruments, and books, and always kept their minds in them. The Sage alone knew that one derives the most benefit from friends. He was therefore delighted when friends came.** (*Jinsilu* 5.37)

Generally speaking friendship is something highly valuable and desirable, as it is shown in the following dialogue between Confucius, Yan Hui, and Zilu:

Once, when Yan Yuan and Zilu were accompanying him, **the Master said: "Why don't each of you speak of your desires?" Zilu said: "I wish that I and my friends could share the same carriages and horses, robes and furs, and never worry if we wore them out."** Yan Yuan said: "I would like never to boast of what good points I have and never cause trouble to others." Zilu said: "I would like to hear the Master's desires." **The Master said: "To free old people from worry, to be trustworthy toward my friends, and at all times solicitous of the young."** (*Analects* 5.26)

The term used by Confucius when he is asking about his disciples' "desires" is 志, which also means the aspiration and desire for Learning. So the three answers here illustrate in different ways the possible conceptions of Learning, and friendship has a significant role in that desire for Learning.

In the *Book of Changes*, extensively studied by Confucius who is said to have written himself the most important appendixes (the Great treatise) traditionally added to this Confucian

Classic, friendship is linked to the 58<sup>th</sup> hexagram, Dui 兌, also called “the Joyous.” 

The hexagram “Joyous” is one of the 8 hexagrams formed by doubling of a trigram (☱; 兌 duì; two first yang –solid, unbroken – lines in the bottom, followed by a yin –broken– line at the third place. The trigram means “swamp” or “lake” but also “mouth” and designates something “open”). So the hexagram of the Joyful is composed by inner and outer trigrams that are the same and are doubled. The comment on the image of the hexagram the Joyful (that is to say the commentary on the hexagram taken as whole) reads as follows:

“Lakes resting one on the other; the image of the Joyous. Thus the superior man joins with his friends for discussion and practice.”

So the repetition/doubling of “mouth” has to be understood as “discussion” (講) and the repetition of “lake” as “practice” (習). This hexagram and its commentary point at the virtue associated to friendship in the Five Bonds, that is to say “faithfulness,” “being faithful to one’s word,” which means the “complete sincerity of the man who is totally committed in his speeches and acts”: 信 (Character composed by the “man” 人 (also written 亻 when composed) and the pictogram of “speech” 言).

The description of the Five Bonds and the virtues associated with each of them appears first in the *Mengzi*:

Hou Ji [Shun’s minister of agriculture] taught the people to sow and to reap and to cultivate the five grains. When the grains ripened, the people has their nourishment. It is the way of human beings that when they have sufficient food, warm clothing, and comfortable dwellings, but are without education, they become little more than birds and beasts. It was the part of the sage [= Shun] to grieve anxiously over this. He appointed Xie minister of education in order to teach people about human relations: **that between parents and children there is affection; between ruler and minister, rightness; between husband and wife, separate functions; between older and younger, proper order; and between friends, faithfulness.** Fangxun [= Yao] said, “Encourage them, lead them, reform them, correct them, assist them, give them wings, let them get it for themselves. Then follow by inspiring them to Virtue.” (*Mengzi* III.A.4)

As it is shown in the quotation, the Five Bonds are basically related to the civilizing process or the “education” (教/教化) ensured by mythical emperors of Antiquity, Yao and Shun, in

order to teach to people how to live as proper men, and not like birds or beasts. What is at stakes here is what might be called the Confucian civilizing project for society. Broadly speaking this Confucian civilizing project has to be understood as the very Confucian Learning, what is also called the Confucian Way. Friendship, as one fundamental human relationship that is ritualized, is thus also involved in the project as a means to practice Confucian Learning and walk on the Confucian Way, as can be seen in the following quotations:

(in chronological order)

Zixia said: “If he treats worthy persons as worthy and is respectful to them, does all in his power to serve his father and mother, gives his best in the service of the ruler, and **in dealings with friends is faithful to his word, though some may say he lacks learning, I would surely call him learned** [學]!” (*Analects* 1.7)

The Master [= Confucius] said: “The proper way is not at all remote from people. If someone takes as the way that which distances them from others, it should not be considered the proper way. [...] **Putting oneself in the place of others and doing one’s best on their behalf does not stray far from the proper way. Do not treat others as you yourself would not wish to be treated. [cf. Golden rule]** Of the four requirements of the exemplary person’s proper path, I am not yet able to satisfy one. I am not yet able to serve my father as I would expect a son to serve me. I am not yet able to serve my lord as I would expect a minister to serve me. I am not yet able to serve my older brother as I would expect a younger brother to serve me. **I am not yet able to first treat my friends as I myself would wish them to treat me.** Where in everyday moral conduct and in everyday attention to proper speech I am lacking in some respect, I must make every effort to attend to this; where there is excess in some respect, I must make every effort to constrain myself. **In speech pay attention to what is done, and in conduct pay attention to what is said.** How could the exemplary person not but earnestly aspire to behave in such a manner? (*Zhongyong* 13; one of the Four Books, originally one chapter of the *Book of Rites*)

Master Ming-Tao [=Cheng Hao] said: “There is nothing outside the Way, and there is no Way outside of things. Thus within heaven and earth there is nowhere without the Way. Right in the relation of father and son, affection is the way, and right in the relation between ruler and minister, seriousness is the way. **From these relations to those of being husband and wife, elder and younger, and friends, there is no activity that is not the Way.** This is why “the Way cannot be separated from us for a moment.” This being the case, to renounce human relations and to do away with the Four Elements is to deviate very far from the Way. [= criticism against Buddhism; Four Elements: earth, water, fire, and wind, the basic elements of the universe] (*Jinsilu* 13.3)

There are usually two Chinese characters meaning “friend” or “friendship”: 朋 and 友. They can be taken separately or together. When they are used separately, 朋 usually refers to a

companion or classmate (it designates indeed the persons who are studying under the same master), and 友 designates more specifically a “friend” or “friendship.” In many texts, this term is also used in a verbal sense as well, when friendship is viewed in parallel with other bonds (especially brotherhood). It has then the meaning of “to befriend someone” and refers to mutual aid and benevolence. Friendship or “being friendly” are then correlated with the idea of being close to others, being intimate, kind and gentle just as if others were one’s own siblings. This is because, as it has been seen previously, friendship is part of the Five Bonds and participates in the same logic of ethical training for the implementation of a good society. But friendship has strong specificities that make it different from other forms of social relationships.

Indeed, friendship is a specific step in the Confucian ethical program, connecting together or bridging together the realm of the self and family interactions on the one hand, and that of society on the other hand. As it is said in the *Mengzi*:

“When those occupying positions below do not gain the confidence of those above, they cannot succeed in governing the people. **There is a way to gain the confidence of those above: one who does not inspire the trust of friends will not have the confidence of those above. There is a way to gain the trust of friends: one who does not serve his parents so as to please them will not inspire the trust of friends.** There is a way to please one’s parents: one who turns within and finds himself not to be sincere does not please his parents. There is a way to be sincere within oneself: if one is not clear about what is good, one will not be sincere within oneself. [...]” (*Mengzi* IV.A.12)

The reason why one cannot gain the trust of friends if one doesn’t serve his parents correctly and is not sincere within oneself is that true friendship attracts and gathers together people who share same culture and same desires for Learning.

Master Zeng said: “The gentleman uses culture [文] in gathering friends and uses friends in helping him to become humane [仁].” (*Analects* 12.24)

The Master said: “If the gentleman lacks gravity, he won’t command respect. If he studies he will avoid narrow-mindedness. Put prime value on loyalty and trustworthiness [信], have no friends who are not your equal, and if you make mistakes, don’t be afraid to correct them.” (*Analects* 1.8; same idea in *Analects* 9.25)

Following the same idea, it was interesting for me, as a French native-speaker, to find out that the English rendering for the French proverb “Qui se ressemble s’assemble” was “Birds of



feather flock together.” It is because friendship is expressed through various metaphors in Confucian texts; and birds are one of them:

“Those rallies, jabbering and cawing badly if not worse than crows, solely gather in order to eat up crops. Companionship [朋] without committing hearts is being outward companions; befriending each other [友] without committing hearts is being outward friends.” (*Fayan* 1.20)

Here the term “rallies” refers to groups of scholars-officials who gather together like noisy flights of crows and whose only common goal is to eat up and devour crops. Birds are a very common metaphor for the scholars and also the ministers, opposed to the ruler. Like in many Western languages, the idea of “wings” refers to the possibility of “rising up” to the top of social ladder. Scholars-officials are often compared to birds gathered together, but depending on their species, they have different attitudes. There are noble birds, that are originally solitary but can meet and befriend birds sharing the same ideals, and conversely there are inferior birds that are just driven by greed and behave like “social pack hunters”:

“How about the worthy man in times of order?” “He is like a phoenix.” “And in times of disorder?” “He is like a phoenix.” The person who asked the question does not understand. “You have not thought about it enough.” He further says: “In times of order, he makes himself visible; in times of disorder, he remains hidden. The swan flies in dark skies, how could the archer hope to cull him? The birds *jiaoming* gather together with caution and feed with purity; the phoenixes only fly around and whizz in Yao’s courtyard.” (*Fayan* 6.16)

In the *Shiji*, 117, biography of Sima Xiangru, it is explained that the bird *jiaoming*, coming from Western territories, looks like a phoenix and only gather together with lonely birds like itself and that feeds only on precious food.

A second metaphor often used to describe the “natural” and mutual attraction existing between friends sharing the same nature and heart is borrowed from the natural world: fire and water.

It is impermissible for a lord of men to be incautious in the selection of his ministers. It is improper for the common people to be careless in the choice of friends. Friends are those with whom one has mutual interests. If their Way is not the same, how can there be mutual interests? When firewood is spread out and lit, fire seeks out the driest sticks; when water is poured out on level ground, it flows to the dampest places. It is evident that things of the same kind naturally come together; hence one reviews a man by looking at his friends. Could there be any doubt about this? To choose good men as one’s friends –in this it is wrong to be incautious, for it is the foundation of inner

power. An *Ode* says: “Do not lean on the great carriage, the swirling dust will blind you.” This says that one should not live among ordinary men. (*Xunzi* 27.102)

If friendship is described as the gathering of people driven by same ideals, it can also be exclusive of other categories of men in a Confucian perspective. Among the people who could be excluded from Confucian ideal friendship, one figure is remarkable, standing on his own in superb and terrible solitude: the ruler. As an ideology and philosophy designed by and for scholars-officials, Confucianism isolates and excludes the ruler from the possibility of true friendship:

Duke Mu often saw Zisi. Once he said: “In antiquity, the ruler of a state of a thousand chariots would have been friendly with scholars. What do you think of that?” Zisi was not pleased and said: “The ancients said, “A scholars should be served.” How could they have said, “Make him your friend?”” Being thus displeased, how could Zisi not have said: “In terms of our positions, you are the ruler, and I am the subject. How could I presume to be a friend of the ruler? In terms of our Virtue, you should be serving me. How could you be my friend?” Thus a ruler with a thousand chariots may have sought to be a friend of a scholar, but he could not do so, much less summon him to his presence. (*Mengzi* V.B.7)

In the same vein, that is to say because of the “role” ritually attributed to each person in certain configurations, friendship would be nonsense between parents and children:

To demand goodness of one another is the Way of friends [朋友之道]. But for father and son to demand goodness of one another entails a great assault on affection [恩]. (*Mengzi* IV.B.30)

Friendship, gathering similar people ideally motivated by the same goal, is subject to a double criteria: that of what is “beneficial” and, conversely, what is “harmful.” Indeed, beside the hexagram of the Joyful (the doubling of the same trigram of the mouth or the lake as seen previously, that is to say the doubling of the same), the notion of friendship appears in the *Book of Changes* in the explanations given about two other hexagrams: hexagram 41 (“Decrease”: Sun 損) and hexagram 42 (“Increase”: Yi 益 – also often translated by “benefit” or “profit”). Friendship is understood as a process of true transformation. As an ethical practice, it must transform and *change* the person who practices it. But this change can either mean an “increase” or a “decrease” in terms of both quality and quantity: quality of the virtue of humaneness, and quantity of good behaviors. Quantity is important indeed, because ethical training is regarded as an accumulative process made of the repetition of good practices and

good thinking that must become, step by step, “natural” in order to transform and improve the self of the practitioner. This is comparable with physical training, consisting in repeating regularly or even daily the same movements in order to improve physical capacities and even transform the whole body. This is the reason why friendship is also part of what is called the “gongfu”/kungfu of vital energy in Confucianism (and I would like to precise that the word meaning “learning” or “studying” in modern Korean is precisely “gongfu”):

If the blood humour is too strong and robust, calm it with balance and harmony. If knowledge and foresight are too penetrating and deep, unify them with ease and sincerity [...] **What is common and mediocre, worthless and undisciplined, overcome with the help of teachers and friends** [...] What is simpleminded but sincere, upright and diligent, consolidate with ritual and music [...] In summary, of all the methods of controlling the vital breath and nourishing the mind, none is more direct than proceeding according to ritual principles, none more essential than obtaining a good teacher, and none more intelligent than unifying one’s likes. (*Xunzi* 2.4)

In the *Analects*, the idea of increase and decrease (of profit and harm) appears in two sentences following one another and focusing on ternary rhythm and number three:

Confucius said: “Three kinds of friends are beneficial [益]; three kinds are harmful [損]. Straightforward friends, sincere friends, well-informed friends –these are beneficial. Hypocritical friends, sycophantic friends, glib-talking friends –these are harmful.” (*Analects* 16.4)

Confucius said: “Three kinds of delight [樂] are beneficial; three kinds are harmful. The delight of regulating oneself with rites and music, the delight of speaking of others’ good points, the delight of having many worthy friends –these are beneficial. Delight in extravagant pleasures, delight in idle wanderings, delight in the joys of the feast –these are harmful.” (*Analects* 16.5)

Please note that number 3 means in the cosmology of the *Book of Changes* the opening to diversity and multiplicity, and thus to endless creative transformations. For example, trigrams that form the 64 hexagrams of the *Book of Changes* are made out of 3 monograms or 3 lines. Besides, Heaven, Earth and Man form a triad that represents the full potency enabling cosmic change as well as the implementation of an ideal humanity. But as an opening to multiplicity, number 3 is also the metaphor of an opening to the possibilities of failures, dangers, dissensions, etc.

Talking about metaphors, I would like to present two other interesting metaphors related to friendship in Confucianism. The first one is craftsmanship:

Zigong asked how to practice humaneness. The Master said: “A craftsman who wants to do his job well must first sharpen his tools. Whatever country you are in, be of service to the high officials who are worthy and become friends with the men of station who are humane.” (*Analects* 15.10)

The second metaphor is jade polishing:

The eighth rule [of school] concerns the selection of friends [擇友]. Its reads: Although transmitting the Way and dispelling doubts fall to the teacher, “linking together swamps” [cf. commentary on the hexagram “the Joyful”] and “assisting the practice of humanity” [= quotation from the *Analects*] depend on classmates and friends [朋友]. Whoever wants to really learn must select learned men who are loyal, faithful, filial with elders, affectionate to brothers, firm, upright, kind-hearted, and serious. They should befriend them, and then admonish each other for misbehaviors, encourage each other to support good, and polish one another by learning by interaction in order to go through to the end with the rule governing friendship. [...]  
(Yulgok, *Hakkyo mobŏm* 8)

This passage from the *Rules of schools* by Yulgok, taken after the rules enacted and written by Zhu Xi at the Academy of the White Deer Cavern (Bailudong shuyuan 白鹿洞書院), one of the greatest educational institutions in pre-modern China, reminds of a famous idea of the *Xunzi*:

Learning and culture are to men what polishing and grinding are to jade. An *Ode* says: “Like bone cut, like horn polished, like jade carved, like stone ground.” This refers to studying and questioning. (*Xunzi* 27.87)

The metaphors of craftsmanship and jade polishing are interesting for they both point at the notion of temporality in ethical training and practice. A good craftsman acquires indeed his full talents through repeated practice with the help of a master and other companions. As I said previously, Confucian ethics are inscribed in a complex temporality coming from the cosmology of the *Book of Changes*. Ethical training, understood metaphorically as a walking on the Confucian Way conjures up very concrete visions of a walking on a path. The efficiency of walking is subject to many different conditions, among which regularity, rhythm, pace, breathing, etc. In order to attain constancy in the midst of changing conditions and in order to sustain the walking effort throughout the process of learning, endurance is crucial. And endurance is enabled by accumulated effort on a daily basis; endurance has to be worked on and progressively developed. That effort is precisely what Confucian ritualized relationships (among which friendship) are concerned with. The “increase” and profit expected from friendship comes indeed from everyday ethical practice:

Master Zeng said: “**Each day I examine myself on three matters.** In making plans for others, am I being loyal to them? **In my dealings with friends, am I being trustworthy?** Am I passing on to others what I have not carefully thought about myself?” (*Analects* 1.4)

Whenever there is any doubt about moral principles, one should wipe out his old views so new ideas will come. Whenever one’s mind penetrates something, he should note it down. If he does not think, his mind will be blocked again. **Furthermore, he should seek the help of friends. Each day he discusses things with friends, each day his ideas will become different. One must discuss things and deliberate like this very day. In time he will naturally feel that he has advanced.** (*Jinsilu* 2.21)

We want friends not for pleasure or comfort but to assist us in the practice of humanity. Nowadays when people make friends they choose to associate with those who know well how to be submissive. They walk shoulder to shoulder and hold hands, believing they feel as one person. But if one word goes wrong, they become angry at each other. It is desirable that friends be humble toward each other and never get tired of doing so. **Therefore, if friends who regard reverence as fundamental intimately associate with each other every day, good results will soon be achieved.** (*Jinsilu* 2.40)

As can be noticed in these quotations, discussions and mutual criticisms or praises are what constitute the heart of the practice of friendship, which is made of mutual polishing, mutual discussion, mutual practice, etc. As we have seen before, speech/dialogue is crucial in friendship, even more than any emotional comfort and support that is commonly believed to be expected from friends and close people. I would like to add that it is certainly because the practice of friendship is also meant in Confucianism as a means to exercise one’s own ethical judgment. A judgment on how people turn statements into deeds, how they are true to their words or not (言). Observing friends, who might be compared to concrete “case studies,” is a good training in understanding the practice of Confucian humaneness, as can be seen in three quotations taken from the *Analects* where Confucius disciples make judgments about one another:

Master Zeng said: “Able but consulting those who lack ability, of many talents but consulting those with few, possessing but seeming to be without, full yet seeming to be empty, offended against but never retaliating –in the past I had a friend who always tried to be like that.” (*Analects* 8.5)

Ziyou said: “My friend Zizhang can do difficult things, but he has not yet mastered humaneness.” (*Analects* 19.15)

Master Zeng said: “Zizhang is imposing indeed, but side by side with one like that it’s hard to achieve humaneness.” (*Analects* 19.16)

But because of the critical aspect of the mutual judgment implied by true practice of friendship, some limitations have to be taken into account:

Ziyou said: “Be too censorious in serving the ruler, and you will end up in disgrace. Be that way with your friends, and you will lose them.” (*Analects* 4.26)

Zigong asked how to deal with friends. The Master said: “Advise them in a loyal manner; lead them with goodness. But if you get nowhere, then stop. No use to bring shame on yourself.” (*Analects* 12.23)

So the most important part of friendship is communication and “speech/talk” in general, but this characteristic may in turn be the cause of the loss of this privileged relationship based on trust and confidence.

To finish this review of the common conceptions of friendship in Confucianism, I would like to allude to a particular form of friendship: the friendship with deceased people:

Mencius said to Wan Zhang: “That scholar, whose goodness is most outstanding in the village, will become friend to all the good scholars of the village. That scholar, whose goodness is most outstanding in the state, will become a friend to all the good scholars of the state. That scholar, whose goodness is the most outstanding in the world, will become a friend to all the good scholars of the world. **When he feels that being a friend of all good scholars of the world is not enough, he will go back in time to consider the people of antiquity, repeating their poems and reading their books. Not knowing what they were like as persons, he considers what they were like in their own time. This is to go back in time and make friends.**” (*Mengzi* V.B.8)

By friendship with the deceased, I was referring to the practice of “reading” in Confucianism that is considered as a way to “make friends” with worthy people who are no longer alive but have left testimonies of their lives and thoughts. But, it is important to underline that real friendship in true life remains superior to that friendship with the ancients and even to practicing rituals. As Xunzi said:

In learning, no method is of more advantage than to be near a man of learning. The *Rituals* and *Music* present models but do not offer explanation; the *Odes* and *Documents* present matters of antiquity but are not always apposite; the *Annals* are laconic, and their import is not quickly grasped. It is just on these occasions that the man of learning repeats the explanations of the gentleman. Thus, he is honored for his comprehensive and acquaintance with the affairs of the world. Therefore it is said: “In learning, no method is of more advantage than to be near a man of learning. [...] Of the direct routes to learning, none is quicker than devotion to a man of learning. The

next best route is exaltation of ritual principles. If you can neither be devoted to a man of learning nor exalt ritual principles, how will you do more than learn unordered facts or merely mechanically follow the *Odes* and *Documents*? In this case you will never, even to the end of your days, escape being nothing more than an untutored scholar. (*Xunzi* 1.11)

By way of a conclusion, I would like to allude to the implications and the concrete application of these conceptions of friendship in Confucianism. For that, I will take the example of Yulgok Yi I, one icon of Korean Confucianism.

Yulgok was a very talented Confucian scholar who also achieved a brilliant career as a high official in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He is one of the few Chosŏn scholars enshrined and revered at the Munmyo (Confucian Shrine) and his collected works (the *Yulgok chŏnsŏ*) had been extensively studied past and present as representing an outstanding example of the Koreanisation of Neo-Confucianism, or to say it more simply an example of the specifically Korean reappraisal of Confucianism. As you may certainly know, the history of Chosŏn dynasty is heavily tributary to what has been called the Confucianisation of Korean society, starting from the broad dissemination of Neo-Confucian ideas received from Song and Yuan China, especially from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards. In most of Yulgok's remaining texts as well as the testimonies of his life and achievements in various historical sources, one can find many traces of the Confucian focus on friendship as a means to practice Learning. Most of the conceptions of Confucian friendship that I have just been detailing in this talk can be found in his philosophical treatises like the *Sŏnghak chipyo*, written for king Sŏnjo as a guide to sage ruling, in his primer of Neo-Confucian education (the *Kyŏngmong yogyŏl*), but also in various programmatic texts written for either local schools or community compacts. One might however wonder how friendship was actually practiced in real life by the man Yulgok. In order to try to answer to that question, the historian is left with a few sources that modern readers would be inclined to define as intimate or private writings, like for instance personal correspondence. Epistolary texts are indeed commonly viewed as the best testimonies to the self. However it is appropriate to remain vigilant as regards the modern distinction between private and public. Epistolary texts of pre-modern periods are indeed both public and private; they were circulated, copied, read in large circles, and finally compiled, edited and published. The very notion of intimacy or privacy, and that of private writing is thus difficult to delineate clearly and even to conceptualize.

Yulgok had many friends, colleagues, siblings, and acquaintances. In his collected writings, one can read many testimonies of his exchanges with them. The available materials are mainly letters, memoirs, poems, farewell notes, tombstones inscriptions, eulogies, etc.,

which are, for most of them, edited (which means that they are not hand-written manuscripts and were certainly altered). A brief survey of these texts reveals that Confucian sociability used many different modes of expression and communication with diverse stylistic features, especially when traces of that sociability have to be found out today in *written* pieces. Because of the *open*-ness of letters and other “personal” writings of any influent scholar-official of pre-modern time, writing style often denotes self-fashioning accompanying the solemnity of writing, contrary to oral and direct expression. Considering this framework, as well as the proper rules of politeness and written genres (prose or poetry don’t imply the same writing style for example), expressions of friendship is sometimes difficult to analyze. In Yulgok’s case, letter-writing understood as a practice of friendship seems to grant two main desires: firstly, exchanging about Confucian learning (that is say, talking about progress made, doubts, technical philosophical problems); secondly, finding consolation and solace. Compared to others texts of the same kind addressed to more distant acquaintances and even to his own siblings, the letters and poems given to friends and fellow Confucians are indeed strongly emotional. This feature leaves the modern reader with the impression that friendship might have been the privileged, not to say the single one, relationship bringing Joy and true pleasure. To say in other words and to stay more cautious perhaps, I would like to argue that in spite of the many constraints imposed by its ideal practice, friendship may have played a very specific and remarkable role in the life of any *literatus* hoping to live as a true Confucian: that of the only channel for the expression of emotions. One should thus remember that, among the Five Bonds, only friendship is subject to deliberate choice and some sort of freedom, depending on chance and human encounters. Contrary to one’s family or ruler, friends can be chosen, even though that choice could lead to disillusion. But precisely because of the very possibility and openness to either “increase” or “decrease,” that is to say positive or negative outcomes, friendship seems to have been both the most difficult and the most rewarding human relationship within the social and intellectual framework of ritualized ethics of Confucianism.