No Friends Inferior to Me?

“Faithfulness and Trustworthiness” (忠信) in Analects 1.8

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Abstract

Many modern scholars read the third line of Analects 1.8 as follows: “[The gentleman] has not a friend who is inferior to him. They argue that Confucius was discriminative in making friends. This paper argues that such reading was perhaps inspired by modern values such as freedom and equality. In fact, by the same token, some scholars tried to explain away the discriminatory tone in Confucius’s saying and interpret the line to mean that “there is no friend who is inferior to oneself in every aspect”. While this reading sounds more reasonable, it also implies that selection is simply out of the question ion making friends. This paper seeks to demonstrate that the line in question should be read in the full context of Analects 1.8 where mean it is preceded by another line that says “[the gentleman] abides by faithfulness and trustworthiness”. Thus, the line in question should mean as “[the gentleman] has not a friend who is not his equal [faithfulness and trustworthiness].” This paper concludes with a discussion of the criteria based on the Analects itself by which faithfulness and trustworthiness may be determined.

Keywords: friends, faithfulness (zhong 忠), trustworthiness (xin 信), Analects 1.8, criteria of friend selection