

Mencius

There was a man of Qi who had a wife and a concubine

4B.33 There was a man of Qi who had a wife and a concubine who lived together with him. Whenever this man went out, he always returned home having feasted on wine and meat. His wife asked him who the hosts were who served him these meals, and everyone he named was a man of wealth and high rank. The wife spoke to the concubine: *“Whenever our husband goes out he always feasts on wine and meat before returning. I asked him who serves him these meals, and everyone he named was a man of wealth and high rank. Yet no prominent person has ever visited here. I am going to spy out where our husband goes.”* So, the wife rose early one morning and slyly followed her husband wherever he went. He went all over the town, but never stopped to talk with anyone. Finally, he reached the eastern wall, where people were offering sacrifices at the graves of their dead. He begged for leftovers from them, and when these were not enough, he turned to beg from others. This was his means of feasting. His wife returned and told the concubine. *“A husband should be someone we look up to and live out our days with. And now this!”* Together, the two cursed their husband and stood crying on one another’s shoulders in the midst of their courtyard. The husband knew nothing of this, and coming back home he strutted proudly before his wife and concubine, peering at them like a lord.

Men strive for wealth and high rank, profit and access to power. Their wives and concubines feel no shame and do not cry upon one another’s shoulders. But from the point of view of a *junzi*, how slim is the difference!

Mencius: An Online teaching translation by Robert Eno. P. 87.
<http://www.indiana.edu/~p374/Mengzi.pdf>

(*) Eno. *Glossary*, p.146. Junzi.

The term *junzi* translates literally as “ruler’s son,” or “prince.” It originally referred to members of the hereditary nobility, but came to be associated more with their superior manners than with their birth. In this sense, the term is parallel to “gentleman,” and it commonly translated in that way.

However, although *junzi* sometimes simply refers to an ordinary ruler or a member of the elite class, [*junzi*] more often denotes an ideal of human excellence that was at the center of Confucian ethics. This term *junzi* can be applied to a person who has committed himself to the path of self-improvement leading towards full humanity, or to someone who has fully realized the ideal. [...] When *junzi* is employed as an ethical term in this sense, it will be left untranslated, appearing only in transcription, as in this instance.