Concept of Li in early Confucian texts

Reading:
Fung Yu-lan, *A history of Chinese philosophy*, 2nd edn. (Princeton, 1952) vol.1, ch. 4, pp. 43-75

Select passages from Lun Yu

KO Thompson, "The Archery of" Wisdom" in the Stream of Life:" Wisdom" in the Four Books with Zhu Xi's Reflections", Philosophy East and West 2007

H Rosemont, R Ames, "Family Reverence (xiao □) as the Source of Consummatory Conduct (ren □)" Dao, Vol. 7, No. 1, 9-19

1. **What are we constrained by?**
   He broadens me with learning and he tightens me with Li (Lun Yu, 9.11, □□□□□□□□□□).

2. **Irrational – rational – supra-rational ?**
   - You mean, the chap who does things knowing that they are not achievable? (*Lun Yu*, 14.38)
   - A noble man always goes by the rightness; the petty and the lowly always go by benefit and loss (*Lun Yu*, 4.16).
   - Lin Fang asked Confucius, `What is the ultimate root of *Li*?' Confucius replied, `Blimey! That is a good question! When it is about provisions, to be genuinely frugal; when it is about funeral, to have a genuine sentiment of poignancy. That is the root of *Li*' (*Lun Yu*, 3.4).

* Bodhisattva should produce `an unsupported thought, …a thought unsupported by sights, sounds, smells, tastes,

touchables or mind-objects.' — The Diamond Sutra, ch. 10c (Edward Conze, *Buddhist Wisdom Books*, pp. 47-48).

3. **Li**

- The Zhou dynasty modelled itself upon the two preceding ones. What a splendid civilization! I follow Zhou (*Lun Yu*, 3.14).
- To follow the *Li*, the cap should be of Hemp. But nowadays everybody uses silk cap and it is economical. I follow the general trend. To follow the *Li*, one ought to bow before climbing up the steps. Nowadays, everyone bows after climbing up the steps, which is rude. Going against the general trend, I follow the proper practice of bowing beforehand (*Lun Yu*, 9.3).
- A noble man does not worry, is not ashamed. When you look at yourself and find no blemish, why would you worry, why should you be ashamed? (*Lun Yu*, 12.4)
- You do not mind if people don't understand you; boy, you sure are a noble man! (*Lun Yu*, 1.1)
- *Li, Li*! Do you think I am talking about jade or silk? (*Lun Yu*, 17.11)

4. **Ren**

- Soothing words and pleasant face; there can hardly be any *ren*. Stiff, firm, crude, with few (awkward) words; they are closer to *ren* (*Lun Yu*, 1.3, 13.27).
- Only the man with *ren* can truly love someone and truly hate someone *Lun Yu*, 4.3).
- To overcome oneself and bring oneself back to *Li*, this is what *ren* is all about (*Lun Yu*, 12.1).
- A man of moral fortitude (*ren*) is bound to have courage' (*Lun Yu*, 14.4).

5. **Subjectivity**
    - The original mind (with which we are born) is more or less the same; what we acquire afterwards tends to make us different (*Lun Yu*, 17.2).
    - When Buddha was staying in a city called Kesaputta, members of Kalama clan asked him: `Various religious leaders and brahmans come to this city and they all explain how wonderful their teachings are and how useless are the others. We have doubts as to which of those teachers are telling the truth and which are lying.' Buddha replies: `You are indeed right to have doubt because your doubt is about a thing which is doubtful in the first place. Do not be carried away by those stories, religious traditions, or by what you have heard elsewhere. … But when you yourself know that certain things are good and that these laudable things are practised by wise men, and that when one practises them, they lead to satisfactory results, then take those things and practise yourself.' – Kalama-sutta, *Anguttara-nikaya* (Pali Text Society edition) vol.1, pp. 187-91.

6. **Xue**
    - Learning will make you overcome the narrow-mindedness (*Lun Yu*, 1.8).
    - Studying without thinking produces false knowledge, thinking without studying is dangerous (*Lun Yu*, 2.15).
    - Zi Xia said, `If you know better than knowing, overcome appearances, support your parents with all your force, support your boss with all your power, socialise with your friends with amity and abide by your words, who can say that you are not learned? I will certainly say that you are

learned.’ (*Lun Yu*, 1.7)

- Listen, You (Zi Lu’s name), do you want me to tell you what knowing is? To know that you know, to know that you do not know, that is what knowing is (*Lun Yu*, 2.17).
- To learn and to apply your learning at the right moment, isn’t it wonderful? (*Lun Yu*, 1.1)

7. **Zhong**

- I know something about music. You need to know when to start, when to pause, when to sing in polyphony, when to sing in unison, when to go the opposite way, when to come back and move in parallel, when to hit hard, when to strum gently. That’s how you play (*Lun Yu*, 3.23).
- Music, music! Do you think I am talking about drums and bells? (*Lun Yu*, 17.11)
- For a noble man, `balanced’ means to know the right timing. For the petty and the lowly, `balanced’ means to have no shame, no fear. – *Zhong Yong* (Middle Way and Constant Practice), ch. 1.

8. **Yong**

- Some know as soon as they are born, some know after some learning [like Confucius himself], some know with great difficulty. But there is no difference in knowing. Some carry out their practice with ease, some do it with profit, some do it with great effort and resolute determination. But there is no difference in carrying out the practice (*Zhong Yong*, ch. 19).
- A noble man does not bend (forget about) his moral fortitude even while eating; even in extreme haste, even in extreme peril, he will act always with moral fortitude (*Lun Yu*, 4.5).

- And how, O Vasettha, a disciple has the attention and comprehension? This is how, Vasettha. In going and coming, the disciple acts with attention and comprehension. In looking in front and looking around, he acts with attention and comprehension. In stretching and bending his limbs, he acts with attention and comprehension. In eating, drinking, chewing and tasting, he acts with attention and comprehension. In defecating and in urinating, he acts with attention and comprehension. In standing up, in sitting down, in sleeping, in waking up, in talking, in keeping quiet, he acts with attention and comprehension.' — *Tevijja-sutta, GanakaMogallana-sutta*

9. **The Way (道 Dao) forward**

   If I understand the Way [attain the Enlightenment] in the morning, it wouldn't matter if I should die in the evening (Lun Yu, 4.8).