

## CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

(a reminiscence of the prison yard by,  
James Riva W38533)

In 1990 the summer was extremely hot in the prison yard. I was going through some particularly painful withdrawal from prescribed psych meds. I would typically have a hot sensation in my head, and stay awake for many days at a stretch with frequent abdominal pains. Another prisoner, whom I don't remember his name, would see me in the yard and talk while I listened. I do not remember if the narrative was fable or actual experience, but he related it as if it were genuine experience of someone he knew.

There was a friend of mine who really excelled at the study of Chinese language and culture. Being a born American and the extreme rarity of an American high school student taking it upon himself to study Chinese, he drew the respect and admiration of the school faculty. By graduation time he had learned to read and write Chinese fluently. His teachers recommended him to University for further study, and a full scholarship was granted.

Only one year into University study he received an unusual invitation to submit to a test by persons in the Chinese American community for possible scholarship abroad in China. He passed the test very well and began his preparation to move to China for three years, full expenses paid.

While he was awaiting his travel papers and making goodbyes to friends and family, he was walking to his apartment and was caught in a torrential downpour. The streets became rivers, and he was hurrying along when he noticed a strange sight on the ground.

Thousands of ants were scurrying along the ground in the rain each clutching a tiny white thing in their jaws. He bent down to look and realized the ants were ferrying their young to higher ground. A nearby storm drain had plugged with leaves and rubbish, and was nearing their anthill. He reflected a moment, took off his shoes and socks, and waded into the deep puddle to unclog the storm drain. Instantly the water sucked in a vortex and the flooding danger to the anthill subsided. He then replaced his shoes and socks and went home.

In China his studies revolved around classical Chinese philosophy. At the end of year three he faced an exam in which each character of Chinese had to be 100% correct in order to pass. Under the pressure he omitted one small diagonal line on a character. His examiner shook his head and groaned, but stood transfixed as two tiny ants scambled across the page, and then sat end to end in place of the missing diagonal line.

The examiner then asked if he had ever done a favor for ants. He was then passed to the next level as 100% correct.