

## TTC poem/stanza/saying 9

### example of comparing translations

1. It is better to leave a vessel unfilled, than to attempt to carry it when it is full. If you keep feeling a point that has been sharpened, the point cannot long preserve its sharpness.
2. When gold and jade fill the hall, their possessor cannot keep them safe. When wealth and honors lead to arrogance, this brings its evil upon itself. When the work is done, and one's name is becoming distinguished, to withdraw into obscurity is the way of Heaven.

**James Legge, 1891**

Grasping to the full,  
are you not likely to be stopped?  
Scheme too sharply,  
can you hold your position for long?  
If gold and jewels fill the hall,  
no one can protect them.

To be rich, and high but proud,  
brings about its own doom.  
To accomplish merit and acquire fame,  
the to withdraw,  
that is Heaven's Way.

**Paul Carus, 1913**

Keep stretching the bow  
You repent of the pull,  
A whetted saw  
Goes thin and dull,  
Surrounded with treasure  
You lie ill at ease,  
Proud beyond measure  
You come to your knees:  
Do enough, without vieing,  
Be living, not dying.

**Witter Bynner, 1944**

To take all you want  
Is never as good  
As to stop when you should.  
Scheme and be sharp  
And you'll not keep it long.  
One never can guard  
His home when it's full  
Of jade and fine gold:  
Wealth, power, and pride  
Bequeath their own doom.  
When fame and success  
Come to you, then retire.  
This is the ordained Way.

**R.B. Blakney, 1955**

Stretch a bow to the very full,\*  
And you will wish you had stopped in time;  
Temper a sword-edge to its very sharpest,  
And you will find it soon grows dull.  
When bronze and jade fill your hall  
It can no longer be guarded.  
Wealth and place breed insolence  
That brings ruin in its train.  
When your work is done, then withdraw!  
Such is Heaven's Way.

*Footnote*

*The expression used can also apply to filling a vessel to the brim, but 'stretching a bow' makes a better parallel to 'sharpening a sword'.*

**Arthur Waley, 1958**

Rather than fill it to the brim by keeping it upright  
Better to have stopped in time; \*  
Hammer it to a point  
And the sharpness cannot be preserved forever;  
There may be gold and jade to fill a hall  
But there is none who can keep them.  
To be overbearing when one has wealth and position  
Is to bring calamity upon oneself.  
To retire when the task is accomplished  
Is the way of heaven.

*Footnote:*

*\*This refers to a vessel which is said to have been in the temple of Chou (or Lu). It stands in position when empty but overturns when full. The moral is that humility is a necessary virtue, especially for those in high places.*

**D.C. Lau, 1963**

Better stop short than fill to the brim.  
Oversharpen the blade, and the edge will soon blunt.  
Amass a store of gold and jade, and no one can protect it.  
Claim wealth and titles, and disaster will follow.  
Retire when the work is done.  
This is the way of heaven.

**Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English, 1972**

1. To hold and fill a vessel to the full,  
It had better not be done.  
To temper and sharpen a sword,  
Its edge could not be kept long.  
To fill the hall with gold and jade,  
There is no way to guard them.  
To be rich, exalted, and proud,  
This is too invite blame upon oneself.

2. When work is done, the person retires,  
Such is the Tao of heaven.

**Ellen M. Chen, 1989**

To hold it upright and fill it,  
Is not so good as stopping in time.  
When you pound it out and give it a point,  
It won't be preserved very long.  
When gold and jade fill your rooms,  
You'll never be able to protect them.  
Arrogance and pride with wealth and rank,  
On their own bring on disaster.  
When the deed is accomplished you retire;  
Such is Heaven's Way!

**Robert G. Henricks, 1989**

Instead of keeping a bow taut while holding it straight,  
    better to relax.  
You may temper a sword until it is razor sharp,  
    but you cannot preserve the edge for long.  
When gold and jade fill your rooms,  
    no one will be able to guard them for you.  
If wealth and honor makes you haughty,  
    you bequeath misfortune upon yourself.  
To withdraw when your work is finished,  
    that is the Way of heaven.

**Victor Mair, 1990**

Fill your bowl to the brim  
and it will spill.  
Keep sharpening your knife  
and it will blunt.  
Chase after money and security  
And your heart will never unclench.  
Care about people's approval  
And you will be their prisoner.

Do your work, then step back.  
The only path to serenity.

**Stephen Mitchell, 1991**

To keep on filling  
is not as good as stopping.  
Calculated sharpness  
cannot be kept for long.  
Though gold and jewels fill their houses,  
no one can keep them safe.  
When the rich upper classes are haughty,  
their legacy indicts them.  
When one's work is accomplished honorably,  
to retire is the Way of heaven.

**Thomas Cleary, 1991**

Hold and fill it—  
Not as good as stopping in time.

Measure and pound it—  
It will not long survive.

When gold and jade fill the hall,  
They cannot be guarded.

Riches and pride  
Bequeath error.

Withdrawing when work is done:  
Heaven's TAO.

**S. Addis and S. Lombardo, 1993**

Instead of pouring in more  
better stop while you can  
making it sharper  
won't help it last longer  
houses full of treasure  
can never be safe  
the vanity of success  
invites its own failure  
when your work is done retire  
this is the Way of Heaven

**Red Pine, 1996**

Brim-fill the bowl,  
it'll spill over.  
Keep sharpening the blade,  
you'll blunt it.

Nobody can protect  
A house full of gold and jade.

Wealth, status, pride,  
are their own ruin.  
To do good, work well, and lie low  
is the way of the blessing.

**Ursula LeGuin, 1997**

Fill a bowl to the brim and it will spill.  
Make a blade too sharp and it will soon blunt.

Amass too much wealth and you will never protect it.  
Too much success breeds arrogance,  
And arrogance brings downfall.

When enough has been done—time to stop!  
This is Heaven's Way.

**Timothy Freke, 1999**

Forcing it fuller and fuller  
can't compare to just enough,  
and honed sharper and sharper  
means it won't keep for long.

Once it's full of jade and gold  
your house will never be safe.  
Proud of wealth and renown  
you bring on your own ruin.

Just do what you do, and then leave:  
Such is the Way of heaven.

**David Hinton, 2000**

Desist before the vessel overruns.  
Honed too sharp no blade retains its edge.  
Treasure-filled no room remains secure.  
Pride in wealth and place yields retribution.  
“Tasks complete, doers retreat”:  
Such is heaven’s way.

*Comment*  
*Stanza [poem] 9 is not found in the Guodian text.*

**Moss Roberts, 2001**

Grabbing and stuffing—  
there is no end to it  
Sharpen a blade too much  
and its edge will soon be lost  
Fill a house with gold and jade  
and no one can protect it  
Puff yourself with honor and pride  
And no one can save you from a fall

Complete the task at hand  
Be selfless in your actions  
This is the way of Heaven  
This is the way to Heaven.

**Jonathan Star, 2001**

It is better to leave a thing alone  
Than to hold it and keep it full to the brim.  
If you sharpen the blade and use it,  
It will not remain sharp for long.  
When gold and jade fill the temple,  
No one can protect them.  
When wealth and honor come together with pride  
Self-destruction quickly joins them.  
After the goal has been achieved and the  
objective has been honorably accomplished,  
The Tao of heaven  
Is to retire from everything.

**Chou-Wing Chohan, Abe Bellenteen and Rosemary Brant, 2002**

To hold until full is not as good as stopping.  
An over-sharpened sword cannot last long.  
A room filled with gold and jewels cannot be protected.  
Boasting of wealth and virtue brings your demise.  
After finishing the work, withdraw.

This is the Way of Heaven.

**Charles Muller, 2005**

One over-sharpens the well-forged blade,  
And it won't last long.

With gold and jade in the hall,  
The house isn't safer.

Wealth and pride  
Are the author's error.

When work is completed,  
It's time to retire.

That is the Tao of heaven.

**Sam Hamill, 2007**

Stop accumulating.  
Whatever is too well-sharpened gets dull.  
Will you be able to guard from thieves  
those rooms full of gold and jade?  
The rich man draped with honors  
attracts misfortune through his pride.  
To withdraw once the work is accomplished  
is truly the way of Heaven.

**Jean Levi, translated from French by Jody Gladding, 2009**

A cup too full will soon be spilled,  
a sword too sharp will soon be dulled,  
too much of anything cannot be kept.

Wealth and power soon turn to arrogance,  
and misfortune follows.

Instead, draw back when your work is done.  
This is the Tao.

**Robert Brookes, 2010**