

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 arrogancy, 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 with draw,
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