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## Chinese Ethics, Mass Media, and Global Development

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This chapter first examines the major concepts of Chinese philosophy that are the core of traditional Chinese ethics. It focuses on traditional Chinese thinking, including the Circular Theory of Tao, the Unity of Human and Divinity, and the Mind of “Jen.”

Second, this chapter defines Chinese ethics, which are based on these philosophies. Buddhist ethics are also included, as their influence on Chinese philosophy dates back to the Tong Dynasty (618–907).

Third, this chapter explores how Chinese intellectuals, such as Confucius (551–497 BC), viewed communication ethics (in his case, oral and written media). Fusing Buddhism and other global ethic systems, Chinese ethics now tackle ancient ideas with fresh eyes, without prejudice but with the Mind of “Jen,” Purity, Equanimity, and Selfless Love to all the creatures.

## Chinese Philosophy

Western nations often feel that China is a mysterious country. For many, it is difficult to understand Chinese culture—how Chinese people think and behave. Apparently, being unique and obscure has its drawbacks in terms of worldwide understanding. Before our discussion of Chinese communications ethics, we need to indicate how ancient Chinese people perceived and comprehended the world.

Modern science, of course, was not available to the ancients. But methods that today would be called qualitative were available, and these methods have stood the test of time. The ancients were not opposed to science; indeed, their worldview was scientific. Contemporary critics who dismiss the ancients as simply superstitious are missing their depth and wisdom. Today, Chinese scholars have the advantage of thousands of years of inquiry as the basis of modern thinking.

### Traditional Chinese Thinking and Concept

Traditional Chinese thinking—systematic and holistic—has a long-term impact on Chinese people, the ethics of society, and the morality of personal life. “System thinking/concept, also called as the world view of holism, is the major part of traditional Chinese thinking.... The whole traditional Chinese culture is in the unity with a system thinking/concept of Chinese medicine” (Liu, 1992, pp. i–ii). To look at the world as a whole system is the core of Chinese thinking. *I-Ching (The Book of Changes)*, published more than 3,000 years ago, shows Chinese thought and belief concerning

nature and humankind. It is a philosophy of holism deeply influential among current Chinese people.

Take, for example, Chinese medicine. Unlike the Western doctors, traditional Chinese doctors look at the patient's body as a whole system instead of separate parts, such as teeth, heart, lung, liver, and so on. Western doctors are specialized in dentistry, periodontosis, cardiology, and so on. But Chinese doctors are specialized in the treatment of "Pien," which uses a stone tool to scratch the patient's skin with the understanding of the inside body's "Jing Law," acupuncture and cauterize with needles and herbs, and Chinese medicines to cure patients.

"Jing Law" goes inside of the whole human body connecting all the organs, vessels, and circulation system with "Chi," the same character of Chi Kon's Chi. (Chi Kon is a kind of Chinese Kon Fu with the exercise of Chi's power in conforming the body to what is outside human body, such as the surrounding environment.) "Jing Law" is like a body's blood vessels, but cannot be found by anatomy. It only exists in a dynamic status when the human body is alive. To Chinese medical students, "Jing Law" is the basic and proper lesson to learn and memorize at the beginning.

Traditional Chinese medicine is still the only science used by Chinese doctors today (Liu, 1992, p. 136). The basic method and principle of Chinese medicine has three major points: (a) to look at and observe the human body from the whole environment, nature and society; (b) to study physiology, pathology, and the cause of disease by focusing on the point of dynamic function with whole structural relations; and

(c) to focus on the information gathered from the connections and relations of the inner human body, human body, and the outside environment (Liu, 1992).

Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia were deeply influenced by Chinese thinking. As we know, the Eastern and Western cultures perceive the world differently in science and religion. Differences in understanding have led to conflict, which is reflected in some of the criticism of Chinese media leveled by people who do not understand “Jen.”

Traditional Chinese thinking is directly related to the development of morality in Chinese society. Three elements in Chinese morality stand out (Liu, 1992): (a) Circular Theory of Tao, (b) Unity of Human and Divinity, and (c) Mind of “Jen” (Mo, 1985), including the Mind of Purity and Equanimity, the Mind of Selfless Love to all the creatures. These three parts are elaborated here.

### **Circular Theory of Tao**

The Circular Theory of Tao is the basic idea of traditional Chinese culture and the deeply held belief of the Chinese people. In the Chinese language, *Tao* means “the way.” Everything is rooted in nature’s way of relationships—proper roles with other people, animals, environment, the earth, the universe, and any spiritual elements that may be. The Circular Theory of Tao means that the universe—nature, the world, and people—are in a circular movement, a dynamic relational circle of happening, developing, ending, decay, and death. In this theory, cause will always be followed by an effect with consequences and impacts on those involved within the circle. As Buddhists believe, if there is the chain of conditional arising, then there must be the chain of conditional ending. Birth, decay, and death are always together as a life circle.

Before the birth of Buddha, *I-Ching*, a book of Circular Theory of Tao, called *A Book of Changes*, was already known in China.

At an early stage in Chinese history (4,000 years ago), intellectuals had already discovered that everything on earth was moving in a periodic way. All living forms were moving periodically so that species could survive generation by generation, just as climates and seasons cycle annually. Even stars in the sky repeat their patterns year after year. Ancient Chinese scholars observed and memorized the world's various dynamic repeating patterns, called *cycles*. As time went on, the ancients compared cycles with cycles, noting the commonalities among cycles, and then created a conceptual model of the universe. They came to believe that this model governs all dynamic behaviors on the earth and even more.

This model is the Circular Theory of Tao. It creates the basic characteristics of Chinese thought. These basic characteristics are used to apply systemic thinking to particular problems. The dynamic pattern of events provides an examination of problems in a large context (the holistic worldview). Both analogical and associative ways of thinking are used to compare different cycles as a problem-solving method because cycles do not exist alone but always interact with each other.

Any change or events of nature, the world, or human beings that conform to the model will bring a good (*Jyi* in Chinese pronunciation means good luck), whereas those that do not conform will bring an evil (*Shiong* in Chinese pronunciation means bad luck). For example, any unusual change of the spring time means farmers may have bad luck during the other three seasons or perhaps in the next year. In ancient time, Chinese farmers knew not to use land for four seasons consecutively but to plow their fields on a

3-year rotation. Otherwise, bad luck would follow. Through this process, Chinese people developed their unique way of thinking and interpreting the world. Therefore, Chinese people think in long-term wholes that affect outcomes, relationships with nature, and family welfare.

Agriculture, fishing, and Chinese medicine vividly illustrate the Circular Theory, which also comes to bear on Chinese ethics.

### **Unity of Human and Divinity**

Chinese people invented paper, making gun powder, and the compass before Western inventors began to dream, but modern science in China lags far behind that of the West. Since late in the Ching Dynasty (1644–1912), Chinese scholars and others have blamed the traditional Chinese Unity of Human and Divinity for stalling the progress of science. But knowledgeable Chinese scholars argue that the accusations are a misunderstanding of the Unity of Human and Divinity. The philosophy of the Unity of Human and Divinity shows how Chinese people see nature, the world, and the universe and humans as related to each other, sharing the same environment, and coexisting in a dynamic circular movement. The Unity of Human and Divinity does not speak against science or scientific thought but resists destructive change to the environment and to nature. Any technique that defies nature, as the Circular Theory of Tao says, finds opposition in the Unity of Human and Divinity.

Chinese people see conformity and consistency between natural rules and human affairs—that is, a link among nature, human personality, and morality. Philosophers such as Lao-Tzu, Chuang-Tzu, and Confucius—the oldest, most famous,

and influential philosophers in ancient China—always look at humans with a reference to nature and the universe, as prescribed by the Circular Theory of Tao. Therefore, Chinese people believe that the events of their daily lives—happiness, anger, sadness, joy, fortune or luck, and even bad luck—are never detached from nature or the environment in which they live. Lao-Tzu, Chuang-Tzu, and Confucius often used mountains, rivers, trees, clouds, and fishes in a pond as metaphors to explain humans life. Chinese people have been immersed in this idea of Unity of Human and Divinity for thousands of years, generation to generation. The belief of the Unity of Human and Divinity was carried by the Chinese to Southeast Asia, Japan, and Korea, and Confucianism is even now widely known to people in Singapore, Korea, and Japan. Usually within a Chinese-oriented society, people prefer to settle arguments in the direction of harmony and peace and to avoid fighting and hatred.

### **Mind of “Jen”**

In Chinese, *Jen* means benevolence, humanity, mercy, charity, magnanimity, and kindness. The “mind of Jen” establishes cognitive patterns as well as ethical precepts. Confucian literature introduces “Jen” from the perspective of personal morality and social ethics. Mencius says that the mind of “Jen” is humanity with love, mercy, and charity, which is different from beast and animal consciousness (Hsieh, Hsieh, & Lehman, 2003). The practice of the mind of “Jen” in daily life is the demonstration and performance of “Jen.” Mind and action must cohere, be one (Tang, 1978).

Chinese people believe that the heart—the mind of “Jen”—carries the self into action and behavior. Therefore, the mind must be cultivated by meditation every day for

people to be good, such as the saints (Confucius, Mencius, and emperors Shuen and Yu). To pursue “Jen” is better than to spend a lifetime pursuing wealth. In Buddhism, people who keep the mind of Purity and Equanimity, and Selfless Love to all the creatures without craving, aversion, and mental and physical sluggishness, will become Buddha. Of course, there are precepts and codes to do daily self-checks. The mind of “Jen” and the mind of Equanimity and Selfless Love are similar because both the Chinese and Buddhists pay attention to self’s goodness and seek a whole society of harmony, happiness, and peace.

## **Chinese Ethics**

The English word *ethics* used in Chinese refers to (a) moral codes, and (b) *Lun Li*. Moral codes are the guideline for social behavior, and *Lun Li* means the normal relationships among people with comparison, classification, and order. Moral codes and *Lun Li* together are the Chinese equivalent to *ethics* in English.

The *Lun* character shows the relationship among people and carries the meaning of the right way to deal with people, called *Lun Ch’ang*. It is the constant and natural way to get along with human beings in a proper role of different relationships. *Lun Li* can be explained as the rationale of *Lun*. When people say *Lun Ch’ang*, usually they refer to the five most important elements of ethics: Tien (the heaven), Di (the earth), Jun (the emperor, the king), Ching (parents), and Shih (the mentor or teacher). These five items sometimes are called Five *Lun*, Five Superiors, or Five Ethics.



## **Five Superiors or Five Ethics**

Almost every Chinese person for thousands of years has been told to live according to the Five Ethics. Tien talks about the relationship between people and the heavens, including gods, divinity, and anything beyond our physical world. Di talks about the relationship between human beings and the earth, especially the environment. To include Tien and Di into ethics is a result from the system concept of “wholeness” and the thought of “the unity of human and divinity” as mentioned before. As these concepts were adopted by intellectuals, the political power that obtained from the Divine Beings had already faded away in Chinese history. This is the major reason that the Chinese developed a system of ethics without any reference to religion. We (the authors) believe that Chinese ethics is the only ethical system that can surpass religious ethical systems.

Scholars consider Di as the beginning of the idea of environment protection. Many historical records show that the ancient Chinese had strong environmental protection codes and practiced them diligently. For instance, Mencius advises fishermen not to put nets so low in a pond that they break the life cycle of the fish in the pond. Again, logging was permitted only within a certain time period in order not to destroy the life cycle of woods or to exhaust timber resources. These ethical codes were typical for environmental protection found 2,500 years ago in China.

In practice, Chinese people carry this belief in every arena, such as in agriculture, medicine, science and technology, life and death, and literature. Chinese people dislike the concept of fighting with nature. Instead, they prefer to live in harmony with nature, even today.

Jun (the emperor, the king), Ching (parents), and Shih (the mentor or teacher) are three kinds of human superiors. In general, the codes of Lun Li ask people to respect and serve their human superiors.

## **Confucian Thought**

Confucius, an ancient philosopher in the early 6th century BC in China, and his follower, Mencius, are common mentors to all Chinese, regardless of a person's level of education. Confucius taught how to be a human being, how to live with nature, and how to behave with people. Most of Confucius' sayings and philosophy are collected in his dialogues, *Lun Yu* (Chu, 1996), by his students. Confucius taught with the wisdom and assistance of his emperor. This teaching is elaborated and developed by his follower Mencius, who eagerly gives advice to government rulers and the emperor but also elaborates Confucius' thoughts of "Hsiao" and "Jen," the two characters in Chinese (like words in English). In short, *Hsiao* carries the meaning of filial piety or devotion to parents and elderly relatives. *Jen* means benevolence, humanity, mercy, charity, magnanimity, and kindness. To Chinese people, Jen is directed toward people and is the ethical principle by which the individual rightly builds relationships. Jen is frequently mentioned (110 times) in *Lun Yu* and 158 times by Mencius. "It also often includes concepts of philanthropy, love, love and justice, and benevolence and generosity" (Hsieh, Hsieh, & Lehman, 2003, p. 270). Everyone recognizes at first glance that the character of Jen is two people together showing kindness to each other. So, Jen represents the basic ethic for Chinese people: get along with others.

Every Chinese person is educated and cultivated to be an individual with filial piety to parents and elderly relatives. In the Chinese culture, people are concerned about their parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents (both parents' sides), uncles and aunts (both parents' sides), and other relatives because these people are one's closest circle of human relationships. This philosophy is reflected in the Chinese language, which has specific kinship terms that have no equivalent words in English or other European languages (see Hsieh, Hsieh, & Lehman, 2003).

Today, some people think the requirements of traditional "Hsiao" may not be fair to a son because Hsiao asks youngsters to serve their elders. But from the system point of view in the long run, everyone has an equal chance to be a father as well as to be a son. So as time goes by, Hsiao is fair to everybody. Besides, Hsiao does enhance people helping each other. A society that practices Hsiao is indeed much better than one without Hsiao.

### **Implementation**

Moral theory must be practiced. In ancient times, Chinese people had a uniquely practical way to implement their ethics system. First, ethics was the responsibility of the government, not the religious leaders. This approach was practiced from 200 BC to 1911. For instance, the examination system for selecting and recruiting government officers was equally open to every male citizen in each dynasty. This system was tightly bounded with ethics by all the emperors (Chi, 2007). The authors believe this approach is more powerful than training people through religious instruction. We do not go any further on the details of implementing ethics systems in China. Details can be founded in Mo's (1985) writing.

Second, the practice of Chinese ethics follows a systematic order. Confucius urged students to educate themselves well, to take good care of families, to manage people in harmony, and then to rule the world in peace (Chu, 1996). The core concept of Chinese philosophy is that one should exercise one's mind to be clear and straight, without craving, aversion, or mental or physical sluggishness as mentioned before in Buddhism. First, then, a person must be educated to be a good person. Then, one can start to help family, others including relatives, country, and world. "In Confucianist philosophy, ethics aims to address the individual and his relationships with others, but also includes the practice of ethics in society. In other words, one's ethics serve not only for the individual's guidance in living with others, but also as society's norm to ensure that society runs harmoniously" (Hsieh, Hsieh, & Lehman, 2003, p. 272).

Sheng (1993) said, "Things being investigated, knowledge becomes complete. Their knowledge being complete, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy" (p. 112). Hence, the practice of Chinese ethics is a way of systematic order, from a person's self-knowledge and then to family, people, states, and the whole kingdom and world. Of course, all the thoughts and approaches mentioned here are derived from the systemic concept of "wholeness" and the "the unity of human and divine," as mentioned before.

### **Interpersonal Relations**

A contemporary Chinese anthropologist and sociologist, X. T. Fe, explained an individual's role in Chinese society after his 40-year study in Chinese rural areas. He said that the "gradient relationships" (Hsieh, Hsieh, & Lehman, 2003) are the Five Ethics in Chinese culture. "The core of ethics is the relationship between people, and people are the core of ethics. The relationship begins with the individual, who should always obey social rules and requirements inherited from his ancestors. If the individual stands in the center, the first and closest circle around him is his family, the second is his village or community, the third is his country, then the world, nature, and heaven" (Hsieh, Hsieh, & Lehman, 2003, p. 271).

Many people think that Chinese ethics is relational rather than task or behavior based. This notion is partially correct, yet it wrongly denies the importance of the rationale of task in Chinese ethics. In fact, when a Chinese person is making a decision, he will usually consider three aspects or consequences of his decision, including (a) relationships as well as the feelings among people, (b) the rationale of doing a task, and (c) what the law states. This three-part approach to making decisions is derived from the systemic concept of "wholeness," the principles of Hsiao and Jen,, and the importance of the family in the implementation of Chinese ethics. So, relationships as well as the feelings among people might come first while facing decisions, but this aspect is not the only concern.

### **The Ethics of Buddhism in China**

When Buddhism was first introduced to China almost 2,000 years ago, Chinese culture was already highly developed. As these two great cultures confronted each other, there were no wars, no serious conflicts, and Chinese adopted Buddhism before

long. The main reasons for this peaceful merging of cultures were: (a) Buddhist and Chinese ethics are compatible, and (b) each system practices ethics similarly. So, the merging happened smoothly and, hence, greatly enriched traditional Chinese culture.

For example, the Buddhist believes in a chain of conditional arising and a chain of conditional ending. This concept is compatible with the Circular Theory of Tao. As another example, Hsiao is emphasized in Buddhism. In this respect, Confucianism and Buddhism are completely compatible. In the practice of ethics, both start with an ethics of the self (M. Lee, 1998; Mo, 1985) by doing meditation. Chinese and Indian people have their own traditional ways of meditating. Chinese people learned many new and effective meditation methods from Buddhism and then developed their own “Zen” meditation. Besides, the mind of Purity, Equanimity, and Selfless Love to all the creatures, mentioned previously, are originally from India’s Buddhism but are compatible with the Chinese thought of the mind of Jen. After thousands of years, the mind of Jen has been enhanced by the mind of Purity, Equanimity, and Selfless Love to all the Creatures. Both are part of Chinese culture.

### **Five Precepts in Buddhism**

The five precepts for living a peaceful, harmonious, and happy life are to abstain from (a) killing any living creature, (b) stealing, (c) all sexual misconduct, (d) telling lies, and (e) all intoxicants. People must practice meditation daily with a mind of awareness on body and thought. This is similar to the advice by one outstanding student of Confucius : “I check my conduct and behavior three times daily.” In Buddhism, people ask for harmony, happiness, and peace as moral priorities to money and living well. In

daily life, they meditate to eliminate desires such as craving, aversion, and mental and physical sluggishness. The Buddhist way of living is similar to Chinese people following their ethics in daily life with “I check myself and my behavior three times a day.” Roman Catholics also do self-examination daily.

## **Confucius and Communication**

Confucius is the first great teacher in Chinese history. He taught through dialogue in the form of “questions and answers.” At the end of his life, he had no publication of his sayings, although he is the best-known philosopher of his time. He said, “Depiction, without writing” because “writing and written staff cannot express the whole spoken language completely and exactly, and spoken language cannot convey the idea and meaning completely and exactly” (I-Ching, Si-Tsi). *Lun Yu* is the collection of Confucius’ dialogues written by his students not him.

Confucius believed in “Li” (ethics). He said, “No words if it is unethical, no viewing/looking if it is unethical, no listening if it is unethical, and no action if it is unethical.” This guideline was for intellectual people in ancient times and also for the media in the present era. In ancient China, intellectuals were community teachers. Today, the media are seen as intellectuals with the responsibility to “speak cautiously and behave carefully.” Unfortunately, Confucius’ sayings are never seriously considered or taught in journalism and mass communication schools (Kuan, 1994). Hardly a person today studies his or her ethics of communication because most professors are educated at universities in the West.

## **Media With Chinese Philosophy**

### **Intellectuals as Teachers for Society**

In Confucius' philosophy, everyone has the potential to become a great intellectual if he or she follows the Li and Lun Li, including Jen, with the underlying meaning of purity, equanimity, and selfless love to all creatures.

In Chinese society, people are categorized into four job status groups: intellectuals, farmers, workers/laborers, and businessmen. Intellectuals are the most respected class in society. Intellectuals are educated and cultivated for self-improvement as well as to enhance life for other people, even for all humans. Intellectuals never care first for their own profits, as do businessmen. In return, Chinese people have paid respect to teachers and professors for thousands of years. People believe that education can change their social status from one generation to another. Therefore, poor families try to send their children to school.

Western people who hold religious faith live in relationship to God for their spiritual life and before law for their social order. Many Eastern people live with their own religion and with law governed by spiritual leaders. In traditional Chinese society, people live with Chinese ethics and philosophy instead of religion.

### **Intellectuals as Media People**

The advent of the Chinese occurred in the Ching Dynasty (around 1815). The first modern newspaper, the *Chinese Monthly Magazine*, was established by Robert Morrison (a missionary pastor from the London Missionary Society) in Malacca, not in



China (T. Lee, 1969). Chinese philosophy understands that media should be operated by intellectuals with education as their first concern, not by capitalist interests. Chinese people believe that media will always put the people's welfare as the first concern, never media profit driven by rules of competition and market survival. Without the intellectuals' ethical concern, media will never reach to the level of good and worthy contributor to social life, and evil, like the devil, is always there waiting for everyone.

## **Chinese Ethics and Global Ethics**

In the information age, we face a new media world, including news, commercial films (especially those produced in Hollywood), and the Internet. This new media world forces all audiences to confront a singular, unified set of programming values, such as American democracy, Hollywood entertainment, and Christian religion. These values were widely argued on the Internet and in the international press after a Danish newspaper published cartoons of Muhammed in 2006 (Mohamed, 2007). The Danish cartoon controversy highlighted the problem of new media confronting diversity and a variety of belief systems. The boundaries among nations, ethnic groups, races, religions, groups, cultures, and even geographical surroundings are not as clearly defined as before.

The global media urgently needs a new professional ethics to forestall further episodes such as the Danish cartoons. Hatred and hostile feelings are a vicious circle without end. Chinese ethics prohibit media people from publically scorning or speaking

in derogative terms of others' feelings or faith. Not only people but all creatures in the world should be treated with the mind of Jen, equanimity, and selfless love. Therefore, traditional Chinese ethics is recommended here as the basis for a new global ethics of mass media. To educate media practitioners in this new global ethics is much more feasible than to ask all the world's people to change their religion, political beliefs, or ethnic habits. Unprecedented changes in information technology will continue to cause much trouble if media professionals do not reconsider ethics.