

Chinese Ethics, Mass Media and the Global Development

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This chapter will first include a condensed introduction to the major concept of Chinese philosophy that is the core of traditional Chinese ethics. Chinese philosophy covers a lot of dimensions, but the chapter will focus on the discussion on the way of traditional Chinese systematic thinking including circular theory of Tao, the unity of human and divinity, and the mind of “Jen.”

Secondly, Chinese ethics will be introduced and with the explanation of the Chinese philosophy carried underlying in Chinese ethics. Then, the Buddhist ethics will be discussed here for it has been a part of Chinese philosophy before Tong dynasty (more than 1500 years ago). Indeed, Chinese ethics carry some of Buddhist thoughts and ethics for years.

Then, this chapter will introduce how the ancient Chinese elites are like Confucius looked at communication media (in his age, the media are oral and written). Mass media to the society are like teachers who are supposed to be good, not become evil. In Chinese culture, teachers are guidance to students, moral figures to the general public.

Chinese Philosophy

The way Chinese thinks

Western people usually feel China is a mysterious country. It is hard for them to imagine how Chinese behave, how Chinese think and after all, they might feel that they don't understand Chinese people and their culture at all. Apparently, Chinese has its own unique culture that is somehow not in common with westerner's. In order to introduce the Chinese ethics system to the audience, the authors think an introduction to the ways of how Chinese thinks, including the fundamental classic philosophies developed by ancient Chinese and how they comprehend and interpret things as they confronted, might be helpful.

Also, please be noted that there is no science at that time. The methods used by ancient Chinese are mainly qualitative approaches that are still in use nowadays. By saying this does not mean the ancient Chinese approaches are not scientific. In stead, scholars nowadays hardly find any ancient Chinese approaches which are considered superstitious or against the scientific spirit. Qualitative approach is an open process. Usually the outcomes will be keeping updated or improved over time. Fortunately, the ancient Chinese got thousands of years to develop their own ethics system.

Unity of Human and Divinity, Holism and Systematical Thoughts

Yi-Ching is the book showing Chinese thoughts and belief in nature and human beings, a philosophy of holism in a systematical thinking.

Circular Theory of Tao

The Unity of Human and Divinity

The Mind of "Jen"

The purity and equanimity (balanced mind), and the selfless love to all the creatures

Chinese Ethics

解釋詞意

In Chinese, the term of ethics has two meanings in English, one is as moral codes and the other is called as “Lun Li” (in Chinese phonetic translation). The moral codes are the guideline for the individual to behave in a society, and Lun Li means the normal relationships among people with comparison, classification, and order. In short, moral codes and Lun Li combine together in Chinese are equivalent to “ethics” in English.

In Chinese, “Lun” character shows the relationship among people, also carries the meaning of the right way to deal with people, called as “Lun Chan,” the constant and natural way to get along with human beings in a proper role of different relationship. Lun Li can be explained as the rationale of Lun. When people say Lun Chan usually they refer to the five most important items/perspectives of ethics. Indeed, they are: Tien (the heaven), Di (the earth), Jun (the emperor, the king), Ching (parents), and Shi (the mentor or teacher). These five items sometimes are called Five Lun, Five Superiors or Five Ethics.

五倫

Almost every Chinese has been told to live according to the Five Ethics in Chinese culture for thousands of years. [Tien talk about the relationship between people and the Heaven including gods, divinity and anything beyond our physical world.](#) Di talks about the relationship between human beings and the earth, especially on the environment we live with. [To include Tien and Di into ethics is a result from the system concept of “wholeness” and the thought “the unity of human and divinity” as mentioned before.](#) In fact, as those concepts were adopted by the elites, the political power that obtained from the Divine Beings had already faded away in the Chinese history. This is the major reason why Chinese developed a system of ethics without the help from any religion. And, the authors believe the Chinese ethics is the only existing ethics system that can surpass religious ethics systems.

[People thought Tien, Di and human beings are within a system. They are not standing against each other in the system. Instead, they should coexist harmonically because they have something in common for they are all existing periodically or cyclically in dynamic ways. Thus, the scope of ethics should be extended large enough to include them all.](#)

Scholars consider including Di in ethics system is the beginning of environment protection idea in ethic system. In fact, many written records show that the ancient Chinese do have strong environment protection codes and actions back in the history. For instance, the book Mencius advises fishers don't put their fishnet too low in a pond in order not to extinguish all fishes. Another example is logging is permitted only within certain time period of a year in order not to exhaust timber resources. These are typical ethical codes for environment protection around 2500 years ago.

In practice, Chinese people carry this belief in everywhere, such as in agriculture, medicine, science and technology, life and death, and literature. Chinese people dislike overcome or fight the nature, instead, they prefer to live with the nature in harmony. It is much true even in nowadays.

Jun (the emperor, the king), Ching (parents), and Shi (the mentor or teacher) are three kinds of human Superiors. We will talk about these items more in the following sections.

孔、孟以人為中心的思想：

Talking about Chinese ethics, Confucius, an ancient philosopher in the early 6th century B. C. in China, and his followers like Mencius, must be the first one or two brought out by every Chinese no matter how much education he had.

It is said that what Confucius said are the principles of how to be human beings, how to live with the nature, how to behave with people. Most of Confucius' sayings and philosophy are collected in his Dialogues, Lun Yu (Chu, 1996) by his students. Confucius even taught his students with the wisdom of assistance to his emperor and others. This is much elaborated and emphasized by his follower, Mencius, a well-known scholar in Confucian after Confucius. Mencius not only pays much attention to giving advices to the ruling government and the emperor, but also elaborates Confucius' thoughts of "Jen" and "Hsiao," the two "characters" in Chinese (like "words" in English). "Jen" means benevolence, humanity, mercy, charity, magnanimity, and kindness. "Hsiao" carries the meaning of filial piety or devotion to parents and elderly relatives.

孝

Every Chinese is educated and cultivated to be a person with filial piety to his parents and elderly relatives in his lifetime. In Chinese culture, people

are much concerned about their parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents (both father's and mother's side), uncles and aunts (both parents' sides), and other relatives, because these people are in the closest circle of the human relationships with them. This is reflected in Chinese language with specific kinship terms that have no equivalent words in English or other European languages. (See details in Hsieh, Hsieh and Lehman, 2003, pp. 271-272)

“Hsiao” is also emphasized by Buddhism. In this aspect, Confucian and Buddhism are completely compatible. This is one of the reasons why Chinese can quickly adopt a foreign religion Buddhism from an unknown country India about 2000 years ago.

Some people nowadays think the requirements of traditional “Hsiao” may not fair to the son, because “Hsiao” asked a lot from youngsters to serve their elderly ones. But, from the system point of view in the long run, every one has equal chance to be father as well as to be son. So, as time goes by, “Hsiao” is fair to everybody. Besides, “Hsiao” do enhance people helping each other. Therefore, a society with the practice of “Hsiao” is indeed much better than a society without “Hsiao”.

仁

“Jen” is toward people in society, the ethical principle for individuals getting with others. “Jen” is the most frequently mentioned in 110 times in Lun Yu and 158 times by Mencius, carried lots of meanings such as the relationship between one and another, benevolence, humanity, mercy, charity, magnanimity, and kindness. “It also often includes concepts of philanthropy, love, love and justice, and benevolence and generosity.” (Hsieh, Hsieh and Lehman, 2003, p.270) In Chinese, the character of “Jen” to everyone at the first glance is two people together with the meaning of being kindness to each other. So, “Jen” tells the basic ethics for Chinese people to get along with others.

倫理的實踐

One very important aspect of ethics is how to bring ethics theories as well as codes are understood, followed and keeps on practicing by people. In other words, an implementing system must come along with ethics theories in order to bring the ethics into reality. While we are planning a global ethics system hoping to improve our living quality and living environment, an implementation system of global ethics is indispensable. In fact, the implementation system of global ethics is far more difficult to figure out

than the theories and codes of global ethics system.

Chinese has a unique practical way to implement their ethics system. Firstly, the ethics system has been conducted and enhanced by government not by any religion. This approach had been used and lasted from approximately 200 B.C. to 1911. For instance, the examination system equally open to every citizen designed for selecting and recruiting government officers in every dynasties is tightly bounded with ethics by almost all the Emperors back in the history. (慕曉芹, 2007) The authors believe this approach is more powerful than the ways of training people serving for religions. We will not go any further for the details of implementing the ethics system in China. For those interested in this topic may refer to (牟宗三, 1985).

Secondly, the practice of Chinese ethics has a way of systematical order. Confucius said that to educate oneself well, to take good care of families, to manage people in harmony, and then to rule the word in peace. (Chu, 1996, p. 6) The core concept of Chinese philosophy is: one should exercise one's mind as clear, straight (without craving, aversion, and mental and physical sluggishness) first, then, he can educate himself as a good person. Then, he can start to help his family, his people including his relatives, his country and the 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 and Lehman, 2003, p.272)

Professor Sheng 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." (1993, p. 112) This explains that the practice of Chinese ethics has a way of systematical order, from a person's self of knowledge and mind to his family, people, states, and the whole kingdom/the world. And, of cause, all those thoughts and approaches mentioned in this section were also derived from the system concept of "wholeness" and the thought "the unity of human and divinity" as mentioned

before.

費孝通的人際關係同心圓

A contemporary Chinese anthropologist and sociologist, X.T. Fe explained an individual's role in Chinese society according to his study in Chinese rural areas for years (over 40 years) that the “gradient relationships” (Hsieh, Hsieh and Lehman, 2003, p. 273) 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 and Lehman, 2003, p.271)

Many people think Chinese look at ethics as relationships between people instead of with a task. This statement is partially correct. This saying denies the understanding of the rationale of task or indicates the ignorance of the important of the rationale of task by Chinese people. In fact, when a Chinese is going to make a decision, he usually will consider three aspects/consequences of his decision, including the relationships as well as the feelings among people, the rationale of doing a task, and lastly what the law stated. This three-aspect approach of making decisions, of cause, is also derived from the system concept of “wholeness”, the principles of “Hsiao”, “Jen” and the importance of the rule that family plays in implementing the Chinese ethics. So, the relationships as well as the feelings among people might come first for many people while they are going to make a decision.

Five Precepts in Buddhism

To abstain from killing any living creature, to abstain from stealing, to abstain from all sexual misconduct, to abstain from telling lies, and to abstain from all intoxicants are the five precepts that are the codes of ethics for people living in a peaceful, harmonious and happy life. People need to practice meditation daily with a mind of awareness on his body and his

thought. This is similar to Confucius' advice to intellectual people as a gentleman /well-educated person that is elaborated as "I check my conducts/behaviors three times daily." In Buddhism, people ask for harmony, happiness, and peace as the priority instead of money, living well in their lifetime. In daily life, they practice meditation on awareness of each one's desires like craving, aversion, and mental and physical sluggishness. The way of Buddhists' living with the code of Buddhism ethics is similar to Chinese intellectual people following the Chinese ethics in their daily with "I check myself and my behavior three times a day," also the same as Catholic's self-examination daily.

Confucius and Communication

Confucius is the first great teacher in Chinese history. He always teaches students in dialogues with the form of "questions and answers." At the end of his age, he didn't have any publication that means without any written book of his sayings though he is a well-known philosopher at his time. He said "depiction, without writing," because "writing and written staff can not

express the whole spoken language completely and exactly, and spoken language cannot convey the idea and meaning completely and exactly.”(Yi Ching, Si-Tsi) (Note: “Lun Yu” is the collection of his dialogues by his students, not written by him.)

Besides, Confucius also shows his belief in “Li” (ethics). He said that “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 is the guideline for intellectual people in ancient time, also for the media in the present. In ancient China, intellectuals and elites are like teachers in community. The media is seen as intellectuals and elites, are supposed to be “speaking cautiously and behaving carefully.”

Media with Chinese Philosophy

Intellectuals as Teachers for Society

In Confucius philosophy, everyone has the potentiality to become a great intellectual if he follows the “Li” and “Lun Li,” especially “Jen” with the great mind and action of benevolence, humanity, mercy, charity, magnanimity, and kindness, concepts of philanthropy, love, love and justice, and generosity.

In Chinese society, intellectuals, farmers, workers/labors and businessmen are used to be categorized in order as the four-status jobs of people. It shows that intellectual people are the most respected class in the society because they are much like Professor Sheng’s saying with a great practice of ethics involving self esteem and the ability of governing a kingdom. Intellectual people are educated and cultivated not only for self but for others also, not only for self living but also for better life for other people or for all the human beings. Especially, intellectuals are never like businessmen care for their own profits/money as the first priority. In return, Chinese people carry the belief to pay their respect to teachers and professors for thousands years. People believe that education can change their social status in generations. Therefore, poor families try their best to send their kids to school, there are thousands of stories in the history, also in the present time.

Intellectuals as media people

The advent of Chinese press is in Ching Dynasty (around 1815), the first modern newspaper, Chinese Monthly Magazine established by Robert Morrison (a missionary priest from London Missionary Society) in Malacca, not in China. (Thomas Lee, 1969, pp. 125-128) With the concept of Chinese philosophy, the press/the media should run by intellectual people for educational purpose as the first concern, not by the businessmen in capitalist society.

Western people live with God in religion for their spiritual life and with law in social order. Many eastern people live with their own religion and with law governed by spiritual leaders. In traditional Chinese society, Chinese people live with Chinese ethics, Chinese philosophy to behave instead of with religion.

(綦曉芹, 2007) 綦曉芹, 科學 (Ke Ju), 中國, 重慶出版社, Jan. 2007. pp2-22.