

# Confucian Teachings on the Moral Self-cultivation

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Confucian Philosophy regards morality as the most important thing for human being. Confucians claim that every human being can be transformed into moral being through self-cultivation in moral education and also ritual practice. That moral education is not for a short term, but for a long time in the moral formation, which teaches human being moral knowledge and also cultivates their moral heart into a full degree. This moral self-cultivation requires piety as a prerequisite condition in entering the moral horizon, and it also requires self-control in human tempers. The ritual practice is observed by the ritual officials which guarantee moral action in reality in the last sense. This morality is not for something beyond, but for the sake of morality itself. This kind of moral tradition is from the Sage-Kings Yao, Shun, Yu, etc., which already lasted thousands of years; therefore, Confucians established their moral philosophy from that moral history.

*Keywords:* morality, self-cultivation, piety, ritual, moral education

## Introduction

Moral education consistently prevails over the whole history of Chinese school education. It is because the typical tradition of the Chinese Philosophy focuses on one eternal theme all of its history: morality. A human being is defined primarily as a moral being for the Chinese Philosophy. This kind of morality-oriented philosophy is advanced by Confucian thinkers. Thereafter, the whole Confucian Philosophy always takes care of morality: human virtue. Amy Olberding pointed out that “Of philosophers, historically and globally, there are none who compare to the Confucians for a passionate commitment to manners and civility” (2019, p. 49). Philip J. Ivanhoe also said that “Chinese thinkers have focused instead on the problem of how to become good. Moral self-cultivation is one of the most thoroughly and regularly discussed topics among Chinese ethical philosophers” (2000, p. ix). Wing-tsit Chan also stated that “If ONE WORD could characterize the entire history of Chinese Philosophy, that word would be humanism..., humanism has dominated Chinese thought from the dawn of its history” (1969, p. 3). Jeeloo Liu further generalized that “Confucianism, as a philosophy of moral politics, moral families, and moral self-cultivation, became the molding ideology of Chinese culture—it dominated the thought and behavior of Chinese intellectuals and general masses alike” (2006, p. 24). Therefore, Confucianism is about morality, and its morality is about humanism, and its humanism is about moral-self cultivation personally and

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moral civility politically.

Confucian characteristic of moral discussion is more about self-practical commitment, rather than theorized concepts. Eric Hutton pointed out that

many philosophers nowadays approach ethics (or more specifically, normative ethics) as a matter of *theoretical* inquiry, rather than as a matter of what we might call “hands-on practice”. Their concern in writing and teaching is primarily with clarifying and evaluating various prescriptions and whole systems of prescriptions for individuals, instead of with exhorting people to follow a particular set of prescriptions or with getting them to abide by those prescriptions consistently. In contrast, Xunzi’s approach to ethics is decidedly practical, in that he is genuinely trying to follow the Way himself and to get others to do so as well. For this reason, much of his writing on ethics is more in the vein of advice than theorizing. (2016b, p. 68)

Peimin Ni also pointed out that

Virtually all scholars of *The Analects* acknowledge that, unlike his Western counterparts who are strongly preoccupied with the search for objective knowledge, Confucius’ primary concern is always how to live a better life and how to become a better person. (2017, p. 24)

Furthermore, Peimin Ni said that

Cheng and Zhu have both pointed out the difference between two approaches to reading—one is intellectual and the other the *gongfu* approach. The former only requires intellectual understanding while the latter requires self-reflection of what is learned and application of it into practice. The former leads only to bookish knowledge and the latter to embodied understanding and moral growth. (2017, p. 29)

Therefore, “Confucius’ teachings are mostly instructions about *how* rather than descriptions about *what*” (Ni, 2017, p. 25). Confucian morality is more about how to educate humankind into moral goodness. For Confucian Philosophers, they all firmly believe that morality is foundation and guarantee to cultivate the world civilization.

### **Self-cultivation and God’s Grace**

How to be moral and civil for humankind? It is through continuous education in self-cultivation of moral characters as Confucians state. To the contrary, Christianity believes that faith in God is the only way toward moral righteousness. With God’s grace, human creatures are justified and endowed with righteousness. It’s God’s grace but not human self-improvement that brings about transformation to human being and the world. Therefore, its focus is God and His power. Human virtue relies on God and His grace. However, Confucian Philosophy emphasizes on self-cultivation, self-regulation, self-discipline, etc., in order to attain moral goodness. Therefore, morality depends on human’s self-improvement. Moreover, social civilization depends on human self-effort in civility and morality.

Accordingly, there are generally two ways towards moral being: self-cultivation and God’s grace. In the Christian world, it’s often said that the more pious a believer is, the more righteous he or she is. Piety is a character that a qualified believer should have in his or her personal faith. Without a character of piety, it would be really tough to continue faithful life and personal transformation. That is, piety as a human character is necessary in moral transformation. Piety makes God’s grace become possible. It’s hard to see a person without piety really taking care about God in his heart. Piety is also what Confucian Philosophy put much emphasis on. Piety (*cheng*) in the Confucian sense means sincerity, no self-deception, truthfulness, faithfulness, etc. “Without sincerity there would be nothing” means nothing morally would be possible if without piety (Chan, 1969, p. 108). Therefore, piety is the indispensable condition for moral transformation. It’s the most important character in self-cultivation.

*The Doctrine of the Mean* stated that “given sincerity, there will be enlightenment, and given enlightenment, there will be sincerity” (Chan, 1969, p. 107). Piety leads into moral comprehension, and moral comprehension leads into piety. In this sense, without piety, moral understanding would also be impossible. *The Doctrine of the Mean* also pointed out that “It is due to our nature that enlightenment results from sincerity. It is due to education that sincerity results from enlightenment” (Chan, 1969, p. 107). It’s human nature that makes piety into moral comprehension, and it’s education that transforms moral comprehension into piety. It then explicates further that “Sincerity means the completion of the self, and the Way is self-directing... Therefore, the superior man values sincerity” (Chan, 1969, p. 108). That is, piety is self-realization for morality. The Way is self-leading. Piety is the beginning of everything, and no piety means nothing in morality. Therefore, a noble man or gentleman should regard piety as a highly important character. Piety lets moral education become possible. A snake has no sense of piety, so there is no way to teach a snake to be a moral being. Piety also lets faith in God become possible. Therefore, piety is also the pre-condition for God’s Grace. The more piety believers have, the more they can receive Gods’ grace, resulting in becoming more righteous. Confucian Philosophy always requires human beings to practice self-cultivation within piety. Piety though in human nature needs human beings to advance and perform it. Without human efforts in education in piety, it would be impossible to have full developed character of piety. If no piety, all morality becomes impossible to Confucian Philosophers. Confucian Philosophy puts lots of efforts to educate and promote piety into humans. In this sense, we can see that both of Confucian Philosophy and Christianity emphasize the indispensability of piety in the moral transformation for human being, though they go different directions for moral education.

### **Confucian Self-cultivation**

Is Confucian self-cultivation possible? Most of people would say: impossible. Why? It is because Bible said human nature is sinful. However, the original sin does not mean human is evil. The sin in its original meaning is that human cannot reach the moral goal God sets up for them. Since no human can attain the highest moral standard God prescribed, hence human beings are sinful. Impossibility in reaching God’s highest morality does not mean human beings cannot become moral persons. Confucius though admitted that he never saw a sage or a divine man. He even further said that he would be happy if there was a noble man. He also criticized himself and said he was not a sage as people acclaimed, but only a moral learner without stop. No matter what the human condition is, Confucius is firmly confident in the truth that human beings can become moral and noble, and even become divine sages through self-cultivation. Confucius said that “the practice of benevolence (*ren*) depends on oneself alone, and not on others” (*The Analects* 12.1). The Master did not give space for an excuse of being immoral, and clearly pointed out that morality depends on human self, not on others. If a person did not want morality, he or she would not be a moral being. However, Confucius pointed out that if a person devoted himself or herself into morality, the whole world would say he or she is moral and virtuous. Therefore, the most important thing is that it is the human being’s self-duty to be morally good. You want morality and you progress it through efforts in self-cultivation in morality.

It’s not easy to do self-cultivation. People know that it’s impossible to lift up one’s head with one’s own hand. But one’s heart-mind can play an important role in changing one’s behavior. Self-cultivation presupposes self-control first. Especially when in anger, a person does need to take self-control seriously. When a cherished car is hit by a drunk driver, would the victim calm down in dealing with the accident kindly? Or would the

unleashed outrage lead to beat the drunk man up? In this situation, if the victim showed courtesy toward him, that would be better. The more human beings are moral, the more civil society would be. *The Doctrine of the Mean* pointed out that:

Before the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are aroused it is called equilibrium (*chung*, centrality, mean). When these feelings are aroused and each and all attain due measure and degree, it is called harmony. Equilibrium is the great foundation of the world, and harmony its universal path. When equilibrium and harmony are realized to the highest degree, heaven and earth will attain their proper order and all things will flourish. (Chan, 1969, p. 98)

Confucians know that human have various tempers and moods. If a person's tempers not aroused, that would be good. However, if a person produced tempers already, their tempers should be in accordance with propriety and rules. Human should not free up their tempers, and also not let them fall into extremity without limitation. That would cause disastrous consequences which would bring about irreparable pains or regrets. Lots of disasters would be possible to avoid, if angry human took self-control in their enflaming angers. *The Doctrine of the Mean* advised human to observe propriety and rules when producing tempers. Only after human tempers are in the self-controlled regulation appropriately, things will get properly nurtured, and Heaven and Earth also get into the right order. Therefore, the self-control of tempers is the first moral task human should take care of. It is human self that controls their tempers. They do their moral jobs to eradicate the fires in their heart. Then the world goes into the right track and direction, and back into normal situation.

### **Moral Education**

How could human being be educated into self-controlled persons? Confucius told us it needs moral learning and practice in the rituals (*li*). Learning is a lifelong activity for Confucius. The pleasure for life is to learn and practice often, as Master said that "Is it not a pleasure, having learned something, to try it out at due intervals?" (*The Analects* 1.1) It is often understood as learning general knowledge. However, the Chinese Sinologist Bojun Yang points out that actually it means learning morality and rituals, and also practicing them (2006, p. 2). Confucius though told his disciples that he knew many skills due to the unfortunate childhood, and he had no intention to teach them skills like farming or fishing. What's in Confucius's heart is the Way and its practice. The Master said "he has not lived in vain who dies the day he is told about the Way" (*The Analects* 4.8). This Way is not about something material, but about human goodness. Confucius once said that he regarded an unschooled person as educated if he or she did utmost in service of parents and the rulers (*The Analects* 1.7). In order to be a noble person, one needs to learn morality and rituals. If humans did not have a chance to learn rituals and etiquettes, they would not know them. As a result, they would not have etiquettes and civil conducts toward other persons. Therefore, it's necessary and even mandatory to require all humans to learn morality and etiquettes for the purpose of individual goodness and also social civility. Philip J. Ivanhoe compared morality as language (2000, p. 22). That is, human being can acquire morality as like they learn a language. Without language study, human being would not know how to speak that language. Therefore, moral learning and ritual studies are necessary if human beings want to be morally good. Confucius once said rulers should educate their people after they are enriched (*The Analects* 13.9). Confucius also pointed out that: Tzu-kung said, "'Poor without being obsequious, wealthy without being arrogant.' What do you think of this saying?" The Master said, "That will do, but better still 'Poor yet delighting in the Way, wealthy yet observant of the rites'" (*The Analects* 1.15).

For Confucius, it's better to enjoy the Way when in poverty, and love rituals when in wealth. Therefore,

education in the Way of morality and rituals is not only to wealthy classes, but also to disadvantaged people. All poor and rich men need moral education, in order to become noble persons. As to the rulers with authority, Confucius also preferred moral learning over family heritage and authority (*The Analects* 11.1). Though some people can get ruling positions inherited from their fathers by heritage tradition, Confucius appraised the people get political positions through learning and study. Learning is not only a school study, but for Confucius it occupies the entire life, until to death (*The Analects* 7.19). The reason is simple in that *Three Character Canon* said if human does not study morality, he or she would not know goodness. Moral study is the indispensable foundation for all morality. Moral learning is not something optional which you can get rid of if you do not like it. If a person thinks that he or she has freedom to not study morality, he or she would put himself or herself into a dangerous situation where filled with moral ignorance. Then they would not have moral discernment or judgement. Greek Philosopher Socrates pointed out that knowledge is virtue, and ignorance is not virtue. All humans should learn moral knowledge, in order for them to become virtuous and civil people toward each other.

### **Cultivation of Moral Heart**

Is moral learning enough for humans to become good people? The answer is: no. According to Confucius, “a man of virtue is sure to be the author of memorable sayings, but the author of memorable sayings is not necessarily virtuous” (*The Analects* 14.4). Moral persons have moral knowledge, but persons with moral knowledge do not surely have moral characters. Confucius also said that “I used to take on trust a man’s deeds after having listened to his words. Now having listened to a man’s words I go on to observe his deeds” (*The Analects* 5.10). Therefore, moral knowledge is not identical to moral act. Only after humans complete their moral conducts, their moral knowledge becomes actualized in reality. Here Confucius is different from Yangming Wang. Yangming Wang firmly believed the unity of knowledge and act. He claimed that moral knowledge necessarily and absolutely leads into moral behavior. If no moral act, that is because no genuine moral knowledge exists there. Yangming Wang pointed out that there is a moral consciousness (*liangzhi*) in humans, which governs human behavior. Once moral knowledge is there, the moral consciousness will lead to moral behavior. However, Yangming Wang’s viewpoints originated from improper understanding of Mencius’s Moral Philosophy. Mencius did not believe that moral consciousness can lead into moral behavior absolutely. He once said that “slight is the difference between man and brutes. The common man loses this distinguishing feature, while the gentleman retains it” (*Mencius* 4b.19). That is, there is not that much difference between a human and an animal. Only noble men reserve their moral consciousness, but common people get away from it. The King Shun governed morally because he did it out of benevolence and righteousness. Though Mencius pointed out that a human should have the sprout of empathy and compassion, actually he clearly knew that the sprout of empathy is just a moral beginning. It’s like a seed that needs nutrition and cultivation for it to grow up into a big tree. The sprout of goodness needs good care and education to become full ledge of morality and virtue. Therefore, Mencius said:

Benevolence is the heart of man, and righteousness his road. Sad it is indeed when a man gives up the right road instead of following it and allows his heart stray without enough sense to go after it. When his chicken and dogs stray, he has sense enough to go after them, but not when what strays is his heart. The sole concern of learning is to go after his strayed heart. That is all. (*Mencius* 6a.11)

Mencius wants the human moral heart should be maintained and nurtured. If the heart of morality lost,

human being should take it back and recover it. Mencius further pointed out that

for a man to give full realization to his heart is for him to understand his own nature, and a man who knows his own nature will know Heaven. The retention of his heart and the nurturing of his nature are the means by which he serves Heaven. (*Mencius* 7a.1)

Mencius claimed that human being has four sprouts of heart: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and intelligence. All of these faculties need nutrition and advancement. After full developed, humans even can comprehend and imitate Heaven. Without full development of moral sprouts, human would seem like something without much difference from animals. This is why Mencius emphasized that “I am good at cultivating my ‘flood-like *chi*’” (*Mencius* 2a.2). He is excellent at nurturing the spirit of goodness and justice. Chung-ying Cheng also pointed out that this kind of *qi* (spirit) derived from the will to goodness. This will come from the self-reflective mind. The self-reflective mind actively lets moral self-fulfillment become possible and developed (Shun & Wong, 2004, p. 129). Hume once said that a human should have moral sentiment, which comes from a sense of moral beauty. Moral sentiment originates in human nature. This is similar to Mencius’s sprout of goodness. This moral sense though primitive, actually lets moral persons become possible once reserved and cultivated. That is, human is not bad by nature. At least, a sprout of goodness is in human nature. That makes world civilization and personal goodness become possible. This is why Mencius said that all humans are capable of becoming a sage of Yao or Shun (*Mencius* 6b.2).

### **Practice of the Ritual**

Moreover, ritual practices are also very crucial for humans to become moral person. Mencius claimed that the importance of rituals is more than food and sex (*Mencius* 6b.1). Confucius also said

do not look unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not listen unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not speak unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not move unless it is in accordance with the rites. (*The Analects* 12.1)

Xunzi also pointed out that

ritual is that by which to correct your person. The teacher is that by which to correct your practice of ritual. If you are without ritual, then how will you correct your person? If you are without teacher, how will you know that your practice of ritual is right? When ritual is so, and you are also so, then this means your disposition accords with ritual. (*Xunzi* 2.175)

Xunzi also said that:

If their lives are without ritual,

Then people cannot survive.

If affairs are without ritual,

In them success does not thrive.

If state and clan are without ritual,

For them peace does not arrive. (*Xunzi* 2.50)

Therefore, ritual is indispensable not only for individuals but also for nations. All of human behaviors should be conducted in accordance with rituals. Hagop Sarkissian pointed out that “rituals are supposed to be approached with a feeling of reverence, and this feeling of reverence in turn imbues the ritual with a kind of sacred authority”

(Olberding, 2014, p. 100). The ritual is sacred and even has authority to let human follow its rules. The ritual is prescribed to promote human behaviors within decency and civility. The core of all rituals is benevolence and reverence. Ritual performance shows reverence and benevolence to other humans. Confucius said to his disciples about serving parents that “when your parents are alive, comply with the rites in serving them; when they die, comply with the rites in burying them; comply with the rites in sacrificing to them” (*The Analects* 2.5). Not only to parents but also to others, humans should express their etiquettes and respect to them. No matter what situation, humans should have proper behaviors within ritual prescriptions. In a wedding party, all guests should show their congratulations and happiness to the married couple. In a funeral court, all people should have sad expressions and show their comfort to the family of the deceased. In a working place, all workers should show their nicety and decency toward each other. The rulers also need to show their etiquettes and respect to their subordinated. For Confucians, there are generally eight categories of rituals: crown, wedding, funeral, sacrifice, feast, archery, diplomacy, and kingly meeting (*guan, hun, sang, ji, xiang, she, pin, chao*). They almost covered all important aspects of human activities. According to three ritual classics (*Zhou Li, Yili, Liji*), every human behavior no matter in what situation should follow rituals and etiquettes. Every act is prescribed and regulated by ritual rules. Then every behavior will not violate the ritual etiquettes and not offend other humans. Confucius’ life ideal is that “at seventy I followed my heart’s desire without overstepping the line” (*The Analects* 2.4). At this level, freedom is not to unleash one’s unruly natural inclinations, but to perform every behavior freely within rules of etiquettes and rituals. Confucius’s freedom is similar to Kantian concept of freedom, which means freely acting in accordance with moral principles. If a person cannot let their behavior obey moral principles, they are prisoned by physical desires. Therefore, the authentic freedom is freedom in morality. This means that the moral act is the real freedom.

Confucius further pointed out that these rituals are not only performed by all people, but also should be observed and regulated by rulers. This is why all rulers over various Chinese dynasties have appointed officials to take responsibility to administrate rituals nationally. All these ritual officials secured and guaranteed rituals performed correctly and properly. Therefore, moral behaviors need ritual practices, and ritual practices need observation and regulation by ritual authorities. These kinds of ritual authorities make the ritual performance consistently and persistently. They also guaranteed human behaviors to follow the ritual rules. In this sense, ritual authorities of observation make moral behaviors possible. Ritual authorities observe the rituals not only by force, but mainly by moral exemplars. Confucius said that moral authorities should function as moral exemplars and influence people with their morality. He pointed out that “if a man is correct in his own person, then there will be obedience without orders being given; but if he is not correct in his own person, there will not be obedience even though orders are given” (*The Analects* 13.6). As to common people, Confucius pointed out that “the gentleman stands in awe of three things. He is in awe of the Decree of Heaven. He is in awe of great men. He is in awe of the words of the sages” (*The Analects* 16.8). Humans should be in reverence and fear of Heaven, the superior, and words of sages. This kind of reverence and fear lets human contain their behaviors within an appropriate degree. Most importantly, that state of awe and reverence lets human continue ritual performance and activities. However, Confucius knew that “the small man, being ignorant of the Decree of Heaven, does not stand in awe of it. He treats great men with insolence and the words of the sages with derision” (*The Analects* 16.8). As to small persons, what Confucius himself did to Shao Zhengmao is a good example. In his time, the young crooked Zhengmao Shao deviated people from morality with his sophist words. Confucius then used the law to punish him, in order to prevent more people from getting corrupted in their mind and heart (*Kongzi Jiayu* Ch. 2). In this sense, to the people with corrupted minds, moral authorities and laws actually are necessary for individual goodness and social civility.

### Morality as the Highest End

Why do we need to be moral persons? Is the morality for the sake of morality itself, or for self-interests and personal gain? Confucius gave us a clear answer: “The benevolent man is attracted to benevolence because he feels at home in it. The wise man is attracted to benevolence because he finds it to his advantage” (*The Analects* 4.2). The noble men rest in benevolence, but the wise men take advantage of benevolence for their profits. Confucius also said that “they sought benevolence and got it. So why should they have any complaints?” (*The Analects* 7.15). If humans want to acquire benevolence, and once they get it, they should have no complaint. The Master also claimed that “is it not gentlemanly not to take offence when others fail to appreciate your abilities?” (*The Analects* 1.1). Morality or nobility is acted for the sake of morality itself, not for anything else. This is what Confucius endorsed and approved. This kind of moral perspective is different from Kantian theory. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant pointed out that morality needs happiness to guarantee its validity. Kant wanted to solve the paradox that if tragedies follow morality, then where is the value of morality. Therefore, he postulated existence of God, eternity of the soul, and free will, in order for the unity of morality and happiness. In this sense, it can be said that Kant needs happiness to guarantee morality ultimately. However, Confucius regarded morality itself as the highest end. He said that “being good as a son and obedient as a young man is, perhaps, the root of a man’s character” (*The Analects* 1.2). *The Great Learning* also points out that “The Way of learning to be great (or adult education) consists in manifesting the clear character, loving the people, and abiding (*chih*) in the highest good” and “From the Son of Heaven down to the common people, all must regard cultivation of the personal life as the root or foundation” (Chan, 1969, pp. 86-87). Therefore, the ultimate purpose for human being is to be the highest good.

Confucius clearly claimed that benevolence is to love people (*The Analects* 12.22). He further explicated that “a benevolent man helps others to take their stand in so far as he himself wishes to take his stand, and gets others there in so far as he himself wishes to get there” (*The Analects* 6.30). If a person wants getting rich, he or she should help other people get rich. This kind of mutual care and goodness is what Confucius promoted among people. Moreover, Confucius regarded filial piety as the root of being benevolence because all human beings start their lives from their families. If a person did not have the characters of filial piety to their parents and siblings, he or she would not be regarded as a benevolent person. Mencius also asserted that

Treat the aged of your own family in a manner befitting their venerable age and extend this treatment to the aged of other families; treat your own young in a manner befitting their tender age and extend this to the young of other families. (*Mencius* 1a.7)

Human beings should start the benevolence from their family, and then extend their benevolence to all others accordingly. In this sense, as to Confucius, human being should not be defined as merely physical being, but essentially as moral being with characters of filial piety and other virtues. Therefore, morality is the most important thing for humans.

Happiness was not the first choice for Confucius. This is why Confucius appraised very much about Yanghui’s lifestyle. He lived in a very poor life, but he was happy and satisfied with it. Poverty was not Confucius’ major concern. But what worried Confucius, “it is these things that cause me concern: failure to cultivate virtue, failure to go more deeply into what I have learned, inability, when I am told what is right, to move to where it is, and inability to reform myself when I have defects” (*The Analects* 7.3). If no continuance in self-cultivation in morality, or no correction after knowing one’s defects, that would be a big concern for Confucius. Moreover,



Confucius said that “wealth and rank attained through immoral means have as much to do with me as passing clouds” (*The Analects* 7.16). If enriched by injustice, that would be like a floating cloud for Confucius. Therefore, there is no first place for material happiness in Confucius’s thoughts. Though he said the wise men may take advantage of benevolence, but that “wealth and high station are what men desire but unless I got them in the right way, I would not remain in them” (*The Analects* 4.5). He never regarded material happiness or wealth as a precondition for humans to be moral beings. Confucius said that “there is no point in seeking the views of a Gentleman who, though he sets his heart on the Way, is ashamed of poor food and poor clothes” (*The Analects* 4.9). He further pointed out that “while the gentleman cherishes benign rule, the small man cherishes his native land. While the gentleman cherishes a respect for the law, the small man cherishes generous treatment” (*The Analects* 4.11). The essence of humans is defined by morality as Confucius claimed. Therefore, the human exemplar is not a wealthy man but a moral person. A noble man in morality should be appraised and respected by all human beings.

Confucius further pointed out that if a person can spend his or her wealth all over to help people in need, that would be not only a benevolent person, but a sage (*The Analects* 6.30). That is, a sage is the one who takes his or her wealth and property to help people all around. Goodness for the sake of people’s welfare, that is noble and divine. Confucius wants all human beings to become noble persons, and even become sages. He wants people to take care of people of otherness. Human should make efforts in taking care of parents, children, friends, rulers, fellows, and all people. Confucius stated that if there is a righteousness between the ruler and the subordinated, a filial piety between parents and children, a trustworthiness between friends, and so on, the whole society will go smoothly and beautiful in the harmony and order. This is why Confucius said that “the rule of virtue can be compared to the Pole Star which commands the homage of the multitude of stars without leaving its place” (*The Analects* 2.1). The foundation of political ruling should be morality. If a ruler is governed with virtue, all things will come around him. The goal of governance should be virtue, and the promotion of virtue over the world is the ultimate goal for all rulers. *The Great Learning* pointed out that “the ancients who wished to manifest their clear character to the world would first bring order to their states” (Chan, 1969, p. 86). Therefore, the highest politics is to bring morality into the whole world and let the whole world enjoy moral life.

### **The Origin of Confucian Moral Thoughts**

Confucius is generally regarded as the founder of the moral philosophy known as Confucianism (Liu, 2006, p. 47). Where did Confucius’s thoughts come from? Is Confucius an original genius to create his own moral philosophy? Peimin Ni said that before Confucius, there was already over two-thousand-year civilization which had moral exemplars like the Sage-Kings Yao, Shun, Yu, and so on. There were various dynasties like Xia, Shang, and Zhou which had long moral traditions. Especially Zhou Dynasty had King Wen and Duke Zhou which made moral virtue as the standard for political governance. Duke Zhou also made ritual propriety as the political principles and people’s rules of conducts. “From this tradition, Confucius developed his own account of human well-being and ritual propriety, which heavily influenced Chinese culture for over two millennia” (Ni, 2017, pp. 1-2). Confucius himself also said that “The Chou is resplendent in culture, having before it the example of the two previous dynasties. I am for the Chou” (*The Analects* 3.14). Xi Zhu explained this saying as such that Zhou Dynasty revised rituals of Xia and Shang Dynasties and also expanded them, to complete the whole ritual propriety fully; thus, Confucius regarded it as beautiful and followed it (2011, p. 65). In this sense, it is the historical tradition and particularly the heritage of Zhou Dynasty that made Confucian moral philosophy become

possible. Confucius also said that “I transmit but do not innovate; I am truthful in what I say and devoted to antiquity” (*The Analects* 7.1). Confucius further stated straightly that “I was not born with knowledge but, being fond of antiquity, I am quick to seek it” (*The Analects* 7.20). Accordingly, Confucius is a learner and a transmitter of moral heritage from antiquity, rather than an original creator for his own moral philosophy. It is over two-thousand-year history of moral tradition that lets Confucian moral philosophy become possible. It is Confucian moral philosophy that makes another two-thousand-year moral tradition become mainstream in cultural thoughts, and also continues its trend in future for generations and generations. In this sense, it can be said that Chinese Philosophy is moral philosophy. Moral self-cultivation is the whole center for Chinese culture. Being morally good is what Chinese people take care of for a lifelong time, which constitutes the essential meaning for their life.

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