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Visualising the historical development and belief system of confucianism

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Abstract

The main aim of this paper is to visualize the historical development and the belief system of Confucianism. Confucianism is a term used in Western literature as the name for the philosophy and religion based on the teachings of its founder Confucius. Confucius believed that political order can be restored if the ideals, standards, and rites found in the ancient classics were put into practice. This practice developed from an ethico-political system of a paternal government based on the doctrine of humaneness. Confucianism has also spread well beyond China, and its principles and values are highly honoured in East Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, and Vietnam (Morgan 2001). The adoption of Confucianism as the official state ideology made Confucian learning the only legitimate content of state education during the Han dynasty. Confucianism has sometimes been purely humanistic, void of any religious elements. While it is true that Confucius did not dwell much into the religious dimension, there is sufficient inferences in his writings that points to this dimension. The basic tenets of Confucianism are captured in the teachings of Confucius which deal with social and moral values. The texts of Confucianism are traditionally known as the “Four Books and Five Classics”. One common practice derived from of this religion is ancestral worship. This is probably the most recognisable influence of Confucius on Chinese culture. The last section of this review takes a comparative look at Confucianism and Christianity. It points out gaps and the bridges that’s between Christians and Confucianism and how interreligious dialogues and the preaching of the gospel relates to Confucian teachings.

Keywords: Confucianism; History; Christianity; Preachers; Religion

1. Introduction

Confucianism has long been a dominant philosophy and religion in the Chinese thought throughout the Chinese history (Chai and Chai 1973, 1). Confucianism is a term used in Western literature as the name for the philosophy and religion based on the teachings of its founder Confucius (孔子). The Chinese calls it Confucian philosophy (儒家) or Confucian religion (儒教) [1]. Confucianism has also spread well beyond China, and its principles and values are highly honoured in East Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, and Vietnam (Morgan 2001, 178). This lesson will look at the historical development, belief system, contemporary practices, and Christianity’s encounter with Christianity. It will conclude with a discussion on how to build bridges to reach a Confucianist with the gospel.

Scholars are often divided over the question whether Confucianism should be considered as a philosophy or a religion (Ching 1993, 52). Scholars with more respect for Confucianism will see it as a philosophy, while those who have a lower opinion will see it as a religion [52]. However, a thorough study of the history of Confucianism reveals the fact that although more emphasis is put on its philosophical and ethical aspects, one cannot totally deny its religious aspects. This section will discuss the historical development, basic tenets, and classical texts of Confucianism.

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2. Historical Development of Confucianism

The historical development of Confucianism is closely tied to the political history of China. It began as a system of thinking that sought to reform China during the period of the Warring States Period (480-222 BC) (Fung 1948, 178). Confucianism eventually became adopted as a system to govern the country. This was when imperial support from the emperors thrust Confucianism into the limelight. Over the centuries, it has also influenced the thinking of the literati and the culture of the populace. Classical Confucianism had also gone through new development as it evolved into NeoConfucianism when it moves from a pursuit of principle (理学) to cultivation of the heart/mind (心学) (Ching 1993, 163). In the modern era, it evolved further to New Confucianism (新儒家) to adjust to the changes brought about by science and society.

2.1. Classical Confucianism

Confucius (551-479 BC) was born in the state of Lu during the Eastern Chou Dynasty (771-225 BC) (Fung 1948, 38). During Confucius' time, the states were fighting each other, and the rulers of the states neglected their duties (Seeger 1973, 123). Confucius believed that political order can be restored if the ideals, standards, and rites found in the ancient classics were put into practice [123]. This prompted him to consolidate, compile and edit the ancient classics. He developed his ethico-political system of a paternal government based on the doctrine of humaneness (仁) (Chai and Chai 1973, 3). After the death of Confucius, his teachings were elaborated and further developed by Mencius (372-289 BC) and Hsün Tzu (荀子) (298-238 BC). Confucianism lost its prominence when the Qin emperor Shih Huang Ti (始皇帝) came into power, as he upheld the legalist school of thought and destroyed all ancient classics [4]. When the Han dynasty took over from the Qin dynasty, Confucianism came into the forefront again [4]. In accordance with the principles of Confucius, Confucian scholar Tung Chung-shu (董仲舒) (179-104 BC) advised the ruler to reform the government and restored the ways of the ancient kings who practised of the five virtues of humaneness, righteousness, ritual, wisdom, and faithfulness (Yao 2000, 85). The adoption of Confucianism as the official state ideology made Confucian learning the only legitimate content of state education during the Han dynasty [86]. This continued into subsequent dynasties.

2.2. Neo-Confucianism

During the Sung (960-1278) and the Ming (1368-1644) dynasties, there was the rise of Neo-Confucianism (Chai and Chai 1973, 6). Neo-Confucianism incorporated Buddhist cosmology and Taoist metaphysics into Confucian ethics and politics (6). There were two main schools of Neo-Confucianism thought: the rationalistic Principal school (理学) and the idealistic Heart/Mind school (心学). The teaching of the rationalistic school is closer to that of classical Confucianism, while the teaching of the idealistic school is closer to Buddhism (6). The development of Confucianism from the Qing Dynasty to that of the Republic (1911-1949) may be characterised by two forces: "the revolt against Neo-Confucianism and the impact of the West" (7). The Qing scholars had no interest in abstract thinking and focused more on action. As such, they sought to "purge Confucianism of Buddhist and Taoist elements" and styled themselves as the "followers of the Han Learning" (7). The impact of the west on Confucianism will be discussed under New Confucianism.

2.3. New Confucianism

The New Culture Movement during the 1920's took on the positivism and pragmatism of the West as their inspiration; with science, social progress and democracy as their main objectives (Chai and Chai 1973, 7). Confucianism was a hindrance to the introduction of new ideas and forces of progress (7). New Confucianism rose as an attempt to adapt the traditional Confucian ideas to the modern environment as it interacted with Christianity, modern European rationalism, and humanism (Yao 2000, 261). Most of these scholars attempted to re-establish Confucianism as a kind of moral spirituality with "a system of comprehensive metaphysics to explore the ultimate meaning of life" (262). They took great effort to use Confucian ideas to address modern issues such as "the tension between individuals and society, between the internal and the external, between the particular and the universal, and between human needs and the environment." [262].

3. Basic Tenets of Confucianism

Confucianism has sometimes been purely humanistic, void of any religious elements. While it is true that Confucius did not dwell much into the religious dimension, there is sufficient inferences in his writings that points to this dimension. The use of the words heaven (天) and heaven's mandate (天命) points to the religious element. It is from the perspectives of heaven and heaven's mandate that one understands the basic tenets of Confucianism. Confucianism believes that heaven is the embodiment and enforcement of the virtues spelt out in the tenets (Yao 2000, 144-147). The

basic tenets of Confucianism are captured in the teachings of Confucius which were recorded in the classical texts compiled or written by him. These tenets deal with social and moral values. They became the virtues that every man and society should cultivate. They are often classified as the five virtues (五常) and the five relationships (五伦).

3.1. Mandate of Heaven

The concept of the mandate of heaven appears to have begun as an explanation to offer legitimacy to the founder of a new dynasty (Taylor 2005, 608). The presupposition is that there is a form of “divine, sacred or absolute intervention” into the historical and political process of the appointment of governments (609). To the Confucianists, the favour or ire of heaven became the means to know if a government rules according to the mandate of heaven (天命) (Yao 2000, 144). This concept was used to legitimise or disqualify the emperors and their reigns. Heaven would also make known its approval or disapproval of human affairs, which can result in blessings or woes through good harvests or natural disasters (144). Confucianism moved this traditional belief in heaven in the direction of rationality and morality (146). Heaven is not treated merely as a sanction, it is also to be the initiator of virtues (Taylor 2005, 610). It is believed that the heaven is the embodiment of virtues and generates the moral power in human beings to become virtuous (Yao 2000, 147).

3.2. The Five Virtues (五常)

The five virtues advocated by Confucius are humaneness (仁), righteousness (义), ritual (礼), wisdom (智) and faithfulness (信). For Confucius, a noble man (君子) must possess these virtues ((Taylor 2005, 132).

3.2.1. Humaneness (仁)

Humaneness (仁) is the most important tenet in Confucianism. Confucius says that “humaneness consists in loving others” (樊迟问仁，孔子说：“对人慈爱。” Analects 12:22). To Confucius, humaneness is the virtue of a noble man (君子). Humaneness is associated with two concepts: loyalty (忠) and altruism (恕) (Ching 1993, 58). The term loyalty here refers to “loyalty to one’s own heart and conscience” (58). It calls for one to control one’s selfish desires and conduct oneself in a proper manner to benefit others. It also means “desiring to sustain oneself, one sustains others; desiring to develop oneself, one develops others” (夫仁者、己欲立而立人、己欲达而达人) (Fung 1948, 43). Altruism refers to respect of and consideration for others (Ching 1993, 58). This means that one “do not do to others what you do not wish for yourself” (Fung 1948, 43).

3.2.2. Righteousness (义)

To Confucius, righteousness refers to the “oughtness” of a situation (Fung 1948, 42). Everyone in the society has something that one ought to do. These things must be done because they are morally right to do. If one does thing without moral considerations, one’s action is no longer righteous. According to Mencius, this sense of righteousness can be cultivated by having a “feeling of shame and dislike” (70).

3.2.3. Ritual (礼)

The Chinese term for ritual (礼) may also be referred to as propriety. It means to conduct oneself according to the doctrinal and ritual prescriptions for proper behaviour in the family and the society (Ching 1993, 60). Mencius said that the “feeling of modesty and yielding is the beginning of propriety” (Fung 1948, 70). One needs to be modest and yield to follow the rituals and conducts.

3.2.4. Wisdom (智)

The idea of wisdom is the emphasis on an active state of knowing, as opposed to a static state of the acquisition of knowledge (Taylor 2005, 74). Wisdom is not seen as a static body of knowledge, but it is a process of experiencing this knowledge (72). Therefore, it is part of the growing maturation of the individual through the body of experiences in life.

3.2.5. Faithfulness (信)

To be faithful is to express what is true and may be rendered as living up to one’s word and carrying in out (Taylor 2005, 235). Faithfulness is properly seen as an outward expression of the nature of innate goodness [236]. One is considered faithful to the degree that one is living up to one’s word.

3.3. The Five Relationships (五伦)

Confucianism focuses on what it means to be a human in society. It understands humanity in terms of the relationships one has with others (Morgan 2001, 200). It emphasises harmony that can be achieved when each person plays his/her

part in the relationships they have with others. Confucius once said: “A ruler must act like a ruler, a subject must act like a subject; a father must act like a father, a son must act like a son” (Analects: 13:3). In other words, one need to act according to the role we are playing.

3.3.1. Father-Son (父子)

Confucian tradition teaches that “between father and son there is affection” (Morgan 2001, 202). Central to this relationship is the concept of “filial piety” (孝). Confucius sees filial piety as the root of all virtues (201). The parents’ responsibilities are “to teach the child, support him financially, and be a moral guide” (201). The child’s responsibilities are to obey the parents and take care of them in their old age.

3.3.2. Elder Brother-Younger Brother (兄弟)

Confucian tradition teaches that “between the older and younger there is proper precedence” (Morgan 2001, 202). The older brother often takes up the responsibility to care for, control and support the younger siblings, especially in the absence of the parents. The younger siblings are expected to obey the older siblings.

3.3.3. Husband-Wife (夫妻)

Confucian tradition teaches that between husband and wife there is “proper distance” or differentiation (Morgan 2001, 202). This highlights the different yet harmonious roles that each party plays. The husband is expected to respect, support, and direct the wife. The wife is expected to respect and submit to her husband (201).

3.3.4. Friend-Friend (朋友)

Friendship is the only non-hierarchical relationship. Mencius said that between friends there is faithfulness (Morgan 2001, 202). Friends are expected to treat each other as though they are siblings.

3.3.5. Ruler-Subject (君臣)

Confucian tradition teaches that between the ruler and his subject there is integrity (Morgan 2001, 202). The relationship between the ruler and his subject is like that of father and son. The only difference is that the rulers are supposed to model their behaviour after the heaven (202).

4. Classical Texts of Confucianism

The texts of Confucianism are traditionally known as the “Four Books and Five Classics” (四书五经). In the collection of The Four Books, three were written by Confucius and one by Mencius. It is traditionally believed that the Five Classics were consolidated and edited by Confucius during his lifetime.

4.1. The Four Books (四书).

The Four Books were consolidated and systematised by Sung Dynasty scholar Chu Hsi (朱熹) and other Neo-Confucian scholars. They were the basic textbooks of the Chinese Imperial Civil Service Examination (科举) (Morgan 2001, 207). The details of The Four Books are listed in Table 1.

4.2. The Five Classics (五经)

It is believed that Confucius consolidated and edited The Five Classics: the Book of Poetry or Songs (诗经), the Book of History (书经) or (尚书), the Book of Rites (礼记) or (周礼), the Book of Changes (易经), the spring and Autumn Annals (春秋经). The details of The Five Classics are listed in Table 2.

Table 1 The Four Books

The Analects (论语)	The Analects contains the main tenets of Confucius’ teachings. The book has altogether twenty chapters. Some of the chapters contain Confucius’ sayings, while others are short stories depicting his conversation with his students, other scholars, and some rulers.
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The Book of Mencius (孟子)	This book is a collection of Mencius' teaching. Most of his teachings are on the development and elaboration of Confucius's teachings. The focus of the book is that violence is counterproductive, and the human beings are good at heart.
The Great Learning (大学)	This book focuses on discussing the true character of a noble person. It is written to give rulers basic guidelines in the art of statesmanship. It provides an eight-step program for reformation: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investigation of things (格物) 2. Extension of knowledge (致知) 3. Sincerity of the will (诚意) 4. Rectification of the mind (正心) 5. Cultivation of the personal life (修身) 6. Regulation of the family (齐家) 7. National order (治国) 8. World peace (平天下)
The Doctrine of the Mean (中庸)	The book was originally part of the Book of Rites. However, it was separated from the rest of the Book because it deals with the connection between human nature and the underlying principles of the universe and can stand alone as a separate book.

Source: Morgan 2001, 208-209.

Table 2 The Five Classics

Book of Poetry (诗经)	Confucius allegedly compiled this book, which contains three hundred and five songs. The book includes four sections with various genre and contents. The genre ranges from folk songs of love, courtship, hunts, dances, banquet songs and state hymns.
Book of History (书经) or (尚书)	This book is a collection of speeches from the emperors and chief ministers. It also has narrative accounts of royal achievements and principles of government.
Book of Rites (礼记) or (周礼)	This book has forty-nine sections dealing with ancient ritual and government, music, and philosophy. It also includes the section called Etiquette (礼仪), which focuses on Manners for Chinese rituals such as marriages, funerals, and archery contests.
Book of Changes (易经)	The Book of Changes probably existed before Confucius' time and was attributed to the ancient sages. The book has short oracles arranged into sixty-four hexagrams, using symbols made up of broken and unbroken lines in groups of six. The Chinese used the book to understand present happenings and future events.
Spring and Autumn Annals (春秋经)	This book is a diary-like history of Confucius' own state of Lu and was for a long time considered to be the only original work by Confucius.

Source: Ching 1993, 56; Morgan 2001, 206-207.

5. Contemporary Practices

One common practice derived from Confucianism is ancestral worship. This is probably the most recognisable influence of Confucius on Chinese culture. The other practice which is less obvious is the worship of Confucius. The other important common practice of Confucianism is the cultivation of self.

5.1. Ancestral Worship

Ancestor worship goes back to the dawn of Chinese history where it was originally the exclusive privilege of the nobility (Ching 1993, 63). This practice took the form of a memorial service held at ancestral temples (63). In the Book of Rites, Confucius is quoted as saying: "The repairing of the ancestral temple and the reverential performance of the sacrifices were intended to teach the people to follow their dead with their filial piety" (Yao 2000, 202). Confucius used these existing rites to promote filial piety. These rites are an extension of the gratitude and affection that a child has towards the parents in the five relationships (五伦) in Confucianism and is expected to extend the genealogical ties across many

generations (Nadeau 2014, 38). It is to be noted that these rites advocated by Confucius was not meant to be a religious activity. Unfortunately, it was developed into ancestor worship by later adherents of Confucianism.

To Confucius' later followers, they believe that the human being is made up of two souls: an upper or intellectual soul (魂); and a lower or animal soul (魄) (Ching 1993, 63; Oldstone-Moore 2002, 90). At death, the intellectual soul (魂) of a person will become the spirit (神), ascend to the world above and ultimately reside in the ancestral tablets. The animal soul (魄) will become the ghost (鬼) and descend with the body into the grave. The animal soul (魄) will remain with the body if it has been buried with proper rites and is propitiated by tomb offerings (Ching 1993, 63; Oldstone-Moore 2002, 90). The descendants of the deceased are expected to regularly offer up wine, food, and incense, either at gravesites or at home (Ching 1993, 63). This care provided will prevent the ancestors from becoming ghosts that are uncared for and would return to haunt them (Oldstone-Moore 2002, 90-91). The descendants who perform the rituals and propitiate their ancestors would be considered filial (Chew 1991, 49-50).

5.2. Worship of Confucius

Confucianism was also promoted as state ideology, and the worship of Confucius became part of state religious activities (Yao 2000, 29). Religious ceremonies were performed on his birthday, and sacrifices were offered at temples dedicated to Confucius (29). Adherents of Confucianism built temples to honour Confucius, his disciples, and other worthy scholars through the ages (Oldstone-Moore 2002, 64). These temples do not have any images or idols, instead, the name of Confucius, his disciples or illustrious followers were inscribed on tablets for the purpose of veneration (64). Traditionally in ancient China, twice-yearly sacrifices used to be offered at these temples by members of state bureaucracy. However, such sacrifices are rarely offered now. The only important offering, which is still celebrated at the temples, is done on Confucius' birthday. The event usually falls on the 28th of September and is also celebrated as Teachers' Day in places like Taiwan (Oldstone-Moore 2002, 64).

5.3. Cultivation of Self

Confucianism believes that human beings are fundamentally good, and "teachable, improvable, and perfectible through self-cultivation" (Odeh and Aghalino 2011, 177). Confucianism focuses on the cultivation of virtues like humaneness, righteousness, ritual, wisdom, and faithfulness. Confucian self-cultivation is concerned with the nurturing of life (养生), the cultivation of the mind/heart (修心) and the formation/achievement of virtues (成德) (Shen 2018, 34). In this regard, Confucius, and subsequent generations of Confucianists use the term noble man (君子) to describe a person who has cultivated such virtues (Taylor 2005, 132). The noble man (君子) is a person who earns his nobility through the pursuit of learning and self-cultivation (Taylor 2005, 132-133). The noble man is a person who fulfils the virtues spoken of by Confucius (133). In so doing, Confucius applies the concept of the noble man which referred to nobility based on birth and heritage to anyone who is willing to cultivate self through learning and pursuit of moral virtues (132-133). This concept of self-cultivation continues to take a prominent place even in the period of Neo-Confucianism (Bol 2008, 257). This is also true amongst New Confucianists (Tu 1978).

6. Christianity's Encounters with Confucianism

In the history of Christianity's encounters with Confucianism in East Asian countries, Christianity had clashes with the Confucian beliefs and practices that were deeply ingrained in these countries. This section will discuss the encounters between Christianity and Confucianism in China and Korea. The discussion will look at issues of Bible translation and ancestor worship in China, and the issue of ancestor worship in Korea.

6.1. Encounters with Confucianism in China

One challenge the Catholic and Protestant missionaries had in China was the translation of the Bible using Confucian terms. Their concern was that the Confucian terms have connotations that were vastly different from the meanings of the Christian terms in the Bible. The other issue is that of ancestor worship which was an inseparable part of the Chinese culture and religion. In Western Sinology, ancestor worship is perceived as a religion because it carries the idea of afterlife, propitiation and request for the protection from ancestral spirits (Rosker 2017, 283).

6.1.1. Bible Translation

The encounters of Christianity with the Chinese were particularly strong during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 AD). The Catholic mission was led by a Jesuit Matteo Ricci in 1582 (Moffett 2005, 108). Matteo Ricci formulated the policy of accommodation where he was open to the adoption of Confucian idea and practices in Christianity (120). Matteo Ricci was comfortable with the use of 天主 (Lord of the heaven) and 上帝 (Emperor of heaven) to mean God (*Deus*) (Xiao and Liu 2018, 29). After Matteo Ricci's death, a dispute occurred among the Jesuits. The successor selected by Matteo Ricci himself, Nicholas Longobardi, opposed Matteo Ricci's policy of accommodation (Moffett 2005, 114). He challenged

Matteo Ricci's use of the words 天主 and 上帝 (Xiao and Liu 2018, 29). He and other Jesuits thought that the concepts behind these words in the Chinese culture were not the same as the term for "God" in Christianity. Nicholas Longobardi opposed Matteo Ricci's explanation and forbade the use of 天主 and 上帝 (29). A conference was set up amongst the Jesuits to debate over this issue. The result of the conference was that the name 上帝 and words found in the ancient Chinese classics must be abandoned in the Catholic discourse, while 天主 was allowed to be retained (Hsia 2009, 59). The Protestant missionaries, like Robert Morrison, did not use the term 天主 for the translation of God as they did not want to follow the Catholics. They had the option to use 上帝 or 神. There was no unanimous or common decision amongst the Protestant missionaries. In the end, there were various translations that used one of these two terms (Covell 1986, 90). For the Chinese, this created some confusion as they could not be sure if they should believe in 天主, 上帝 or 神 (90).

6.1.2. Ancestor Worship

The other challenge that the missionaries had was the issue of ancestor worship. Matteo Ricci proposed that the Jesuit missionaries should accept traditional Chinese rituals and beliefs, work in the urban areas, and evangelise the elite (Xiao and Liu 2018, 28). Matteo Ricci did not see ancestral worship and the worship of Confucius as religious activities but as important traditions in Chinese culture (Hinds 2016, 6). His position put him at good stead with the Ming emperors. This was by no means a unanimous position of all Jesuits. Matteo Ricci's successor Nicholas Longobardi was opposed to ancestral worship (Xiao and Liu 2018, 29). This opposition was further reinforced by the Dominican missionaries who came to China during the Qing Dynasty (1644 to 1912). The Dominicans also opposed ancestor worship. They were ministering in Fujian, and they saw ancestor worship as a Chinese folk belief, which was totally different from what Matteo Ricci saw as he was generally in contact with Chinese upper-class intellectuals (29). The Dominicans influenced Pope Innocent X to issue an order to forbid Chinese Christians to worship the ancestors and Confucius in 1645 (Moffett 2005, 123). In 1704, after the Roman Curia judged "Chinese Rites" as heresy, Emperor Kangxi announced that if the missionaries in China opposed the "Chinese Rites", it would be impossible for them to stay in China (Xiao and Liu 2018, 30). The Jesuits relayed Emperor Kangxi's position to the Roman Curia, hoping for some changes of the arbitrament. But, Pope Clement XI restated the order and issued a new order to anathematize all who did not execute the order (30). Angered by the Vatican's pronouncements on the Rites Controversy, Emperor Kangxi outlawed Christian missionary work throughout the empire (30-31). China saw the Vatican as trying to subsume Chinese culture and tradition to the standard of western culture (31). It was from the period of the Rites Controversy that the Catholic missionaries no longer enjoyed imperial favour to propagate their message in China (31). The Protestant missionaries were quite similar in their treatment of ancestor worship. Some explicitly forbade ancestor worship while others strongly advised against it (Covell 1986, 118). There were also suggestions to provide functional substitutes to ancestor worship, like putting bouquets of flowers instead of offering meat and drinks [120-121].

6.2. Encounters with Confucianism in Korea

Catholicism came to Korea in the eighteenth century (Oh 1993, 303). The main reason for the conflict between Confucianism and Christianity in Korea was that Christianity was perceived as anti-social and anti-cultural (306). A century after the "Rites Controversy" in China, the Papal decree on the Rites Controversy from the Vatican arrived in Korean in 1790 (306). Although the Korean Catholics accepted it, there was a clash between the Confucian Korean government and the Catholic Church of Korea (306). There were numerous anti-Catholic Church tracts and memorials requesting that the government ban the new Catholic faith, to the extent of urging families to force Catholics in their families to recant their faith (307). Julia Ching has pointed out that even up till today, Korean Christians still see themselves as Christians with Confucian background and values (1993, 85). Korean Christians cannot ignore the "religio-cultural legacy of Confucianism" which has been their tradition for the past five centuries (Oh 1993, 309).

7. Building bridges for the gospel

This section will take a comparative look at Confucianism and Christianity. This will allow Christians to see the gaps and the bridges for interreligious dialogues and for the preaching of the gospel to those who follows Confucian teachings.

7.1. Delete the Practice of Ancestor Worship

The Confucian practice of ancestor worship is strongly associated with the virtue of filial piety. Those descendants, who fail to fulfil their duties in ancestor worship, will allegedly cause their ancestors to become ghosts who are not taken care of. This is seen as an unfilial act. The act of filial piety towards the departed ancestors is celebrated in a big way on Qing Ming Jie (清明节 or Tomb-Sweeping Day). On this occasion, the living will go to the tombs, temples and columbariums to remember the departed. They will bring offerings of food; joss sticks and paper money to send to the departed ancestors. Ancestor worship is not accepted in the Bible. As such, this practice should be deleted. Christianity emphasises the importance of honouring parents when there are still living rather than providing for them after they are dead. While the Confucianists believe that the souls of the deceased reside at the tablet and the gravesite, the Bible

advocates that the souls will eventually reside either in heaven or hell. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), the rich man, who did not follow the ways of God, end up in hell. Lazarus, however, was in the bosom of Abraham.

7.2. Revise the Concept of Heaven's Mandate (天命)

The Confucian concept of Heaven's Mandate has similarity with the Christian concept of God's will. A clear revision will be to allow God to come into the lives of Confucianists who are converted to Christianity. Instead of pursuing heaven's mandate, they will now be pursuing God's will. For Christians, God's will is revealed to them by the sovereign God with whom they have a personal relationship. God reveals His will to Christians personally and He guides them to follow His will (Jeremiah 33:3; Ephesians 1:9). Christianity can help revise Confucian impersonal heaven to the personal God. With a personal God in their lives, Confucianists who become Christians can know, live, and participate in God's wonderful will for their lives (Romans 12:1-2).

7.3. Affirm the Importance of the Five Relationships

One focus of Confucianism is the relationships one has with others both in the family and in the society. Where relationship is concerned, Confucianism emphasises a lot on the actual duties one must fulfil in various relationships. For example, in a father and son relationship, the father must fulfil his duties as a father and the son must also fulfil his. The Bible does not lack teachings on the different types of relationships one has with others. In the sixth to the tenth commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) from the Ten Commandments, God clearly spelt out how man is to relate with his parents and fellow human beings. This was further reiterated by Jesus when He summed it all up in the Two Great Commandments, to love God and to love one's neighbours as oneself (Matthew 22:36-40). Christians can affirm Confucius' teaching on the five relationships and use this as a bridge to relate to the Two Great Commandments of Jesus and then to God. From the Christian perspective, it is the love of God that makes love at all levels of relationship possible.

8. Conclusion

This lesson has helped us to better understand the tenets and practices of Confucianism. Confucian values are deeply rooted in various aspects of Chinese culture, lifestyle and thinking. It has great influenced on the thinking and religious practices of people from the East Asian countries. A good understanding of Confucianism will facilitate a meaningful conversation with many East Asians who are influenced by Confucianism. The Christian can then find bridges to help them understand the gospel.

Compliance with ethical standards

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