

Elaboration of the Philosophical Values of Paradigmatic Excerpts of “The Analects of Confucius”

Qiang Xiong

College of Foreign Languages, Hunan University, China

Abstract—“The Analects of Confucius” authentically keeps a record of the words and deeds of Confucius and his disciples. It’s one of the four classical works of Confucian culture. By citing many exemplary texts from “Confucian Analects” and delineating and expounding on their connotational significance, the ethical and philosophical importance and values of “Confucian Analects” are emphatically manifested; meanwhile, their mirroring and guiding values on one’s behaviour are further specifically illustrated.

Index Terms— “The Analects of Confucius”, Confucius, filial piety, benevolence, virtue

I. INTRODUCTION

During the period of feudal societies, “The Analects of Confucius” had always been a necessary enlightenment textbook for students. It occupies an immensely important position in Chinese educational and cultural history. The essence of this great work focuses on the general principles of filial piety, reverence of tutors and elders, social etiquette and propriety, acquisition of knowledge, social conduct and personal behavior, etc.

One of the deepest teachings of Confucius may have been the superiority of personal exemplification over explicit rules of behavior. Because his moral teachings emphasize self-cultivation, emulation of moral exemplars, and the attainment of skilled judgment rather than knowledge of rules, Confucius's ethics may be considered a type of virtue ethics. Confucius' moral system was based upon empathy and understanding others. (2016; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucius>)

His teachings rarely rely on reasoned argument and ethical ideals and methods are conveyed more indirectly, through allusions, innuendo, and even tautology. This is why his teachings need to be examined and put into proper context in order to be understood. A good example is found in this famous anecdote:

When the stables were burnt down, on returning from court, Confucius said, “Was anyone hurt?” He did not ask about the horses.

(Analects X.11, tr. A. Waley, 1941, p51)

The passage conveys the lesson that by not asking about the horses, Confucius demonstrated that a sage values human beings over property; readers of this lesson are led to reflect on whether their response would follow Confucius's, and to pursue ethical self-improvement if it would not. Confucius, an exemplar of human excellence, serves as the ultimate model, rather than a deity or a universally true set of abstract principles. For these reasons, according to many Eastern and Western commentators, Confucius's teaching may be considered a Chinese example of humanism. (2017; <http://zhidao.baidu.com/link>)

II. BODY

Chapter 2 of “The Analects of Confucius” reads,

Filial piety and fraternal submission are the foundation of all virtuous practice.

1. The philosopher Yû said, “They are few who, being filial and fraternal, are fond of offending against their superiors. There have been none, who, not liking to offend against their superiors, have been fond of stirring up confusion.

2. “The superior man bends his attention to what is radical. That being established, all practical courses naturally grow up. Filial piety and fraternal submission! -- are they not the root of all benevolent actions?” (tr. James Legge, 1893, p75)

Yû believes that, if a man is pious to his parents and submissive to his elder brothers at home, then he will be loyal to his fatherland. One’s filial piety and fraternal submission are the premises of his loyalty. And one’s loyalty is the aim of his filialness and brotherly obedience. This point sheds much guiding light on the cultivation of patriotism. If a nation’s youth are filial at home, there is no doubt that they will be patriotic towards their motherland. Filial piety and fraternal submission are the fundamentals of benevolence, which is key to comprehending Confucius’ philosophical and ethical thought whose core is benevolence. Benevolence is shown as friendliness in social intercourse. So one’s friendliness shown outside corresponds to the affection between family members at home.

Chapter 3 of “Confucian Analects” reads,

Fair appearances are suspicious.

The Master said, "Fine words and an insinuating appearance are seldom associated with true virtue." (tr. James Legge, 1893, p43)

In this chapter, Confucius argues about the converse of “benevolence”, i.e., plausibility; adept at flowery language. The Confucianists uphold simplicity and unpretentiousness and oppose to sweet words. They advocate that one should be careful about and consistent with his utterances; action precedes speech; they argue against doing as one wishes in words and deeds and being all talk and no deed or only remaining at the talking stage. This manifests that Confucius and Confucianists value one’s practical action and specially stress that one’s action should suit his words; empty talk and such practice as speaking one way and thinking another should be strictly avoided. All these qualities are characterized by “integrity”. As a matter of fact, such practicality and plainness have had a long-term impact on Chinese people and have become the quintessence of Chinese traditional ideology and culture.

Chapter 4 of “Confucian Analects” reads,

How the philosopher Tsang daily examined himself, to guard against his being guilty of any imposition.

The philosopher Tsang said, "I daily examine myself on three points:-- whether, in transacting business for others, I may have been not faithful;-- whether, in intercourse with friends, I may have been not sincere;-- whether I may have not mastered and practiced the instructions of my teacher." (James Legge, 1893, p45)

Confucians attach great importance to personal moral integrity in order to mould ideal personality. Actually, the self-examination discussed in this chapter is the basic way for self-cultivation.

During the Period of Spring and Autumn, the society had been undergoing violent changes. Reflected in the domain of human consciousness, people’s ideological beliefs had begun to be wavering, i.e. the conventional beliefs in people’s minds had become unsteady. In view of this, Zen Shen, one of Confucius’ favorite disciples, introduced such method of self-cultivation as “looking into one’s heart” by constantly examining one’s speeches and actions, in order to perfect one’s personality. This “introspective” approach to moral cultivation is worthy of reference even today, since it particularly stresses the initiative and awareness to self-cultivate.

Also in this chapter, Zen Zi proposed the categories of “loyalty” and “faith”. “Loyalty” is characterized by “being thorough or exhaustive”. i.e. sparing no effort in fulfilling a task. Or, doing one’s best till one’s heart ceases to beat. “Faith” has two connotations. One is “confidence”; the other is “credit”, which signifies “probity and no cheat”. This is applied to manage the relations between friends or between superiors and subordinates. “Faith” is especially related to “speech”; denoting “speaking truth” and “keeping one’s word”. This is the cornerstone of conducting oneself in society.

Chapter six of “Confucian Analects” reads,

Rules for the training of the young:-- duty first and then accomplishments.

The Master said, "A youth, when at home, should be filial, and, abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good. When he has time and opportunity, after the performance of these things, he should employ them in polite studies." (James Legge, 1893, p56)

In Chapter two, the topic of filialness and fraternal submission was touched upon, in this chapter the issue has been referred to again. Confucius demanded his disciples, first of all, to be devoted to filial piety and brotherly obedience, sincerity and truthfulness, philanthropy and closeness to the benevolent. He also required his pupils to foster good moral concept and favorable moral conduct. Besides these, if their time and energy remain, they can employ them to the study of famous ancient books and increase of their cultural knowledge. This demonstrates that Confucian teachings are centred around moralism and focused on cultivating his disciples’ virtues. However, the learning of their book knowledge is allocated secondary importance.

Chapter 7 reads,

Tsze-hsiâ’s views of the substance of learning.

Tsze-hsiâ said, "If a man withdraws his mind from the love of beauty, and applies it as sincerely to the love of the virtuous; if, in serving his parents, he can exert his utmost strength; if, in serving his prince, he can devote his life; if, in his intercourse with his friends, his words are sincere:-- although men say that he has not learned, I will certainly say that he has." (James Legge, 1893, p62)

In last chapter, we read “When he has time and opportunity, after the performance of these things, he should employ them in polite studies.” (James Legge, 1893, p56) Whereas what Tsze-hsiâ says in this chapter is a further development of what his Master purported in the previous chapter.

Tsze-hsiâ holds that to judge whether a man is learned or not, or whether he conducts his studies well or poorly, the major attention should not be paid to his book knowledge; instead, the highlight should be focused upon if he applies such traditional ethical moralities as “filial piety”, “loyalty” and “faithfulness”, etc.. So long as he has materialized the few last points, he is viewed as a gentleman who is immersed in moral cultivation, even if he should himself claim he is not a real scholar. Therefore, if the theme of this chapter is associated with that of the last, we can see more clearly that Confucian teachings are deeply rooted in the cultivation of virtues.

Regarding Contemporary international community where moral integrity is in real crisis, we should say this point possesses its strong realistic implications.

Chapter 8 of “Confucian analects” reads,

Principles of self-cultivation.

1. The Master said, "If the scholar be not grave, he will not call forth any veneration, and his learning will not be solid.
2. "Hold faithfulness and sincerity as first principles.
3. "Have no friends not equal to yourself.
4. "When you have faults, do not fear to abandon them." (James Legge, 1893, p78)

In this chapter, Confucius puts forward the virtues that a noble man should have, i.e. being serious and dignified, being keen on studies, being prudent in making friends, being able to rectify one's faults, etc.. A gentleman with ideal personality should present himself as grave and stately in appearance, making others feel he's reliable and worthy of being entrusted. He should attach great importance to learning, not be self-reclusive, be adept at making friends and be sure to correct his faults. These four principles are of key importance. As a person with sound character, he never fears to abandon his faults if he has them. This is certainly the right attitude towards one's errors and lapses. It glitters with the brilliance of truth and reflects the consummate morality envisioned in Confucius' mind. And it assumes great value for us to decode Confucianism.

Chapter 9 reads,

The good effect of attention on the part of superiors to the offices of the dead:-- an admonition of Tsâng Shan.

The philosopher Tsang said, "Let there be a careful attention to perform the funeral rites to parents, and let them be followed when long gone with the ceremonies of sacrifice;-- then the virtue of the people will resume its proper excellence." (James Legge, 1893, p89)

Confucius actually didn't believe in the existence of spirits. This is attested by his words---"keep supernatural beings at a distance" Although he didn't advocate such proposition as "one's soul exists after his death", he attached great importance to the rite of mourning. In Confucius' concepts, sacrifice had been alienated. It is not only in memory of somebody dead; rather, it is regarded as the continuation and expression of fulfilling one's filial piety. Moreover, it can carry on and cultivate one's feeling of filial piety towards his parents and forefathers. Therefore, this chapter develops in depth the details of such moral concept and moral act as filial piety. The reason why Confucianists stress the morality of filial piety is that filialness is the basis of loyalty. He who wouldn't fulfill his filial piety towards his parents is not supposed to show loyalty to his motherland. So loyalty is the extension and externalization of filialness. That the topics of loyalty and filial piety appear time and again in "Confucian Analects" indicates how much importance Confucianists attach to these moral ethics. They hope that, by way of such moralizing, people can be shaped into such cultured noble individuals who possess both qualities of loyalty and filial piety. This idea corresponds to the patriarchal system practiced during the period of Spring and Autumn. Once loyalty and filialness are actualized, both the society and the individual family can enjoy peace and stability.

Chapter 10 reads,

Characteristics of Confucius, and their influence on the princes of the time.

1. Tsze-ch'in asked Tsze-kung, saying, "When our master comes to any country, he does not fail to learn all about its government. Does he ask his information? or is it given to him?"
2. Tsze-kung said, "Our master is benign, upright, courteous, temperate, and complaisant and thus he gets his information. The master's mode of asking information! -- is it not different from that of other men?" (James Legge ,1893, p92)

In this chapter, the individual behaviorism of Confucius has been delineated through the conversation between Tsze-ch'in and Tsze-kung. The reason why Confucius was well received and valued by the rulers of all states is that he possessed such moral characters as being mild, kind-hearted, respectful, thrifty and simple and modest and humble. Confucius believes that trying to preeminent pushes one to strive for good reputation; overstating one's accomplishment makes one fight for fame and wealth. If one fails to acquire them, then he harbors rancor against others; if he has insatiable desire for fame and wealth, then he violates the principle of "giving way to others". From these we can see that the valuable point for "giving way to others" to evolve into a desirable social custom lies in : in terms of human feelings, humility helps one take more after others' strong points and caution against others' weak points. This can incline people to unity, harmony, friendliness, goodness and charity; whereas the social atmosphere of competing for fame, wealth and higher social position induces one to be jealous of man of talent. The social effects of these two tendencies are at opposite poles.

The Master said, "It is virtuous manners which constitute the excellence of a neighborhood. If a man in selecting a residence do not fix on one where such prevail, how can he be wise?" (James Legge, 1893, p95)

Everyone's moral cultivation is not only a personal matter, but also necessarily associated with the external surroundings where one reside. Paying attention to one's residential circumstance and the choosing of one's friends is a consistent issue to which the Confucius attach much importance. As the old saying goes, he who touches rouge will be stained red, he who touches pitch will be defiled. If one live with the virtuous, then he will be strongly influenced by these people as the result of his close association with them. Otherwise, it is quite unlikely that he'd foster the righteous sentiment.

The Master said, "Those who are without virtue cannot abide long either in a condition of poverty and hardship, or in a condition of enjoyment. The virtuous rest in virtue; the wise desire virtue." (James Legge, 1893, p98)

In this chapter, Confucius believes that it's impossible for those unkind to stay long either in poverty or comfort. Otherwise, they would engage themselves in wrongdoings or rise in revolt, or indulge themselves in an extravagant and dissipated life. Only those moral men will take comfort in benevolence; moreover, the wise will also perform benevolent deeds. The advocacy of this ideology guides us to mind one's moral integrity, to be absolutely determined and to keep one's moral courage in any circumstances.

The Master said, "It is only the truly virtuous man, who can love, or who can hate, others." (James Legge, 1893, p101)

When the Confucianists discuss "benevolence", they not only talk about "loving others", but also "hating others". To be sure, Confucius here didn't mention whom to love and whom to hate. But, as we know, love and hatred is an inevitable couple. They exist in contrast to each other. So long as "benevolence" is fulfilled, the correct categories of love and hatred will certainly follow.

The Master said, "If the will be set on virtue, there will be no practice of wickedness." (James Legge, 1893, p105)

This chapter closely follows the last. Once you have cultivated kindheartedness, you wouldn't commit wrongdoings, i.e., you wouldn't defy your superiors and start a rebellion. Neither would you do whatever you want and indulge a life of extravagance and dissipation. Rather, you would perform good deeds which are beneficial to your country and common people.

The Master said, "Riches and honors are what men desire. If they cannot be obtained in the proper way, they should not be held. Poverty and meanness are what men dislike. If they cannot be avoided in the proper way, they should not be avoided. (James Legge, 1893, p108)

Confucius said: Everyone is desirous of riches and dignitary. However, if you acquire them through unjust means, you wouldn't enjoy them. Likewise, everyone disgusts poverty and humbleness, however, if you get rid of them through unjust means, you wouldn't cast them off. How can he be called a noble man if he separates from kindheartedness? A noble man wouldn't depart from moral integrity for a single moment. He will behave kindly even at the most pressing time. He is bound to act benevolently even when he drift from place to place homeless and miserable.

The passage above reflects Confucius's Doctrine of Ethics and Desire. No one is willing to lead a poverty-stricken, hard, destitute and homeless life. All is hoping for a rich, honourable, easy and comfortable life. But this must be obtained through valid means and approaches. Otherwise, one would rather be poor than enjoy wealth and rank. The value of this concept still can't be underestimated even today.

The Master said, "I have not seen a person who loved virtue, or one who hated what was not virtuous. He who loved virtue, would esteem nothing above it. He who hated what is not virtuous, would practice virtue in such a way that he would not allow anything that is not virtuous to approach his person.

"Is any one able for one day to apply his strength to virtue? I have not seen the case in which his strength would be insufficient.

"Should there possibly be any such case, I have not seen it." (James Legge, 1893, p113)

Confucius particularly stressed individual morality, especially the sentiment that cultivates benevolence. But in that chaotic society, the men who are fond of moral integrity were seldom seen. Therefore Confucius said he had seen none. Nonetheless, Confucius believes that the cultivation of kindheartedness mainly depends upon individual's conscious efforts. Because through one's personal endeavors, he absolutely can reach the state of benevolence.

The Master said, "The faults of men are characteristic of the class to which they belong. By observing a man's faults, it may be known that he is virtuous." (James Legge, 1893, p115)

Confucius believes that the fundamental reason why a man commits a fault is that he isn't kindhearted. A benevolent man, in most cases, would avoid errors. Whereas a man without moral integrity would inevitably make mistakes. Therefore, from this we can say the faults the unkind men commit are similar in nature. This point, from another perspective, stresses the importance of strengthening moral integrity.

The Master said, "The superior man, in the world, does not set his mind either for anything, or against anything; what is right he will follow." (James Legge, 1893, p118)

In this chapter, Confucius proposed one of the fundamental points required of the noble man: "to follow what is right." A noble man with great personality is supposed to be upright in character, amicable, conduct himself seriously and flexibly in society, not to make a fish of one and flesh of another. This chapter again discusses the issue of individual morality.

The Master said: "He who acts with a constant view to his own advantage will be much murmured against." (James Legge, 1893, p125)

This chapter still discusses the issue of righteousness and profit. Confucius believes that being a man of noble personality, he wouldn't always think about the gains and losses of his personal profit. Much less would he indulge himself in the headlong pursuit of his own benefit. If he did, his egoistic practice would incur resentment and censure from various sources. Confucius here still upholds such a viewpoint as "righteousness first, profit second."

The Master said, "The mind of the superior man is conversant with righteousness; the mind of the mean man is conversant with gain." (James Legge, 1893, p128)

Among Confucian teachings, this saying has exerted much influence upon following generations and has become a well-known phrase. It has clearly put forward the issue of righteousness and profit. Confucius believes that profit should

be subordinate to righteousness. Justice should be valued above material gains. The justice in his mind is on a par with the morality that complies with the hierarchical order. If one is in blind pursuit of personal interests, he will defy his superiors and start a rebellion, thus, disrupt rank order. Consequently, those who pursue personal gains are regarded as base men. Through the further development of subsequent Confucianists, this ideology has evolved into the concept of righteousness and profit where these two contradictory entity are in sharp contrast, i.e., either this or that.

The Master said, "When we see men of worth, we should think of equaling them; when we see men of a contrary character, we should turn inwards and examine ourselves." (James Legge, 1893, p132)

This chapter raises the issue of individual's morality. This is one of the approaches to self-cultivation, i.e., "emulate those who are better than oneself; introspect oneself regarding an unworthy person." Actually, this equals to "by learning others' merits, we correct our own faults. In the meantime, with the faults of others as a mirror, not repeating someone else's old track." This is a rational attitude, today still serves as an insightful opinion.

The Master said, "The reason why the ancients did not readily give utterance to their words, was that they feared lest their actions should not come up to them." (James Legge, 1893, p134)

Confucius constantly states that one should speak and act cautiously. One should not promise readily or declare where one stands easily. If you fail to implement your promise, then you'd break the promise made to others. Consequently, your prestige would be decreased. So Confucius said that the ancients tended to guard their tongues, let alone speak out whatever words in their mind, because they'd feel ashamed if they couldn't keep their promise. Altogether, this idea is highly advisable.

The Master said, "Fine words, an insinuating appearance, and excessive respect;-Tso Ch'iu-ming was ashamed of them. I also am ashamed of them. To conceal resentment against a person, and appear friendly with him;-Tso Ch'iu-ming was ashamed of such conduct. I also am ashamed of it." (James Legge, 1893, p138)

Confucius was averse to fine words and an insinuating countenance. He advocated integrity, open-mindedness and honesty and opposed to duplicity and inconsistency of one's outside and inside. All these conform to Confucius's basic requirements to cultivate sound personality. This ideology is still significant to a certain extent even today. And it holds strong pertinence towards those hypocrites.

The Master said, "It is all over. I have not yet seen one who could perceive his faults, and inwardly accuse himself." (James Legge, 1893, p142)

Throughout the ages, It's been often the case that some can instantly spot others' faults and shortcomings, but are blind to their own mistakes. Or, there are such men who refuse to admit their own defects even though they are conscious of them, either out of the fear of losing faces or for some other reasons. So certainly it's even more impossible for these men to accuse themselves inwardly. What's more dramatic is that there even exists such more unscrupulous men, where although it is they themselves who committed mistakes, they went so far as to lay the blame at the door of others, instead of examining themselves conscientiously. Surely these men should be classified as absolute hypocrites. Confucius said that he had not seen men who knew their distance and who could rectify upon errors.

As a matter of fact, have we seen such hypocritical people fewer in our realistic social life?

Tsze-hwa being employed on a mission to Ch'i, the disciple Zan requested grain for his mother. The Master said, "Give her a fu." Yen requested more. "Give her a yi," said the Master. Yen gave her five ping. The Master said, "When Ch'ih was proceeding to Ch'i, he had fat horses to his carriage, and wore light furs. I have heard that a superior man helps the distressed, but does not add to the wealth of the rich." (James Legge, 1893, p145)

Confucius held that "the superior man helps out the needy instead of the rich." This idea originates from the Confucian "benevolence" ideology. Confucian "affection" doctrine is not narrowly limited to caring for one's family members and friends; rather, it possesses certain universality. He also thought the recipients of the alms should be the poor instead of the rich. The material relief should be offered in such a mode as "providing timely help" instead of "adding brilliance to one's present splendor." This thought conforms to humanitarianism.

Yuan Sze being made governor of his town by the Master, he gave him nine hundred measures of grain, but Sze declined them.

The Master said, "Do not decline them. May you not give them away in the neighborhoods, hamlets, towns, and villages?" (James Legge, 1893, p148)

Treating others with "benevolence" is one of the Confucian traditions. That Confucius advocated "provided alms to the needy" manifested that he was catholic in his sympathies. This can be associated with the gist of the last chapter.

The Master said to Tsze-hsia, "Do you be a scholar after the style of the superior man, and not after that of the mean man." (James Legge, 1893, p154)

In this chapter, Confucius differentiated between "Confucian scholar" and "base scholar". He demanded that Tsze-hsia be a confucian scholar, not be a mean scholar. "Confucian scholar" refers to those with status of dignity, having a good knowledge of law and discipline rite and of ideal character. Whereas "base scholar" designates those with lowly status, having little knowledge of etiquette and of mediocre character.

The Master said, "Where the solid qualities are in excess of accomplishments, we have rusticity; where the accomplishments are in excess of the solid qualities, we have the manners of a clerk. When the accomplishments and solid qualities are equally blended, we then have the man of virtue." (James Legge, 1893, p156)

This passage is concise and comprehensive. It categorically states the proper relationship between one's plain character and his literary grace as well as the personality frame of superior man. It's highly generalized the "wen zhi"(one's simplicity and exploits) ideology of Confucius. These two categories are a unity of opposites. They are interdependent, undivided and equally important. This ideology of Confucius has undergone continuous practice of more than two thousand years. It has been constantly enriched and developed. It has greatly influenced our thought and behavior and produced profound impact on us.

The Master said, "Man is born for uprightness. If a man loses his uprightness, and yet lives, his escape from death is the effect of mere good fortune." (James Legge, 1893, p162)

"Uprightness" is the moral norm of the Confucian school and conforms with benevolence, signifying straight state of mind. It's synonymous with integrity, frankness, honesty and decency. It' in sharp contrast with hypocrisy and treachery. Naturally an honest man doesn't harbor much evil idea. However, there also exists in society some dishonest men. They are able to live and even live better. This is simply because they luckily avoid catastrophes. It doesn't indicate that their dishonesty is exemplary.

"Now the man of perfect virtue, wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others. "To be able to judge of others by what is nigh in ourselves;-this may be called the art of virtue."(James Legge ,1893, p165)

This doctrine is a cardinal principle to practice "benevolence". "Putting oneself in the place of another" fulfils the principle of "benevolence". These are the basic opinions of Confucius about "benevolence" and constitute an important part of Confucian thoughts. These basic social codes of ethics are still valuable today.

III. CONCLUSION

To sum up, many doctrines and lessons of "Confucian Analects" glitter brilliant ancient philosophical wisdom. They also hold practical and realistic sense in terms of directing one's proper social behaviour. Last but not least, it exerts strong positive energy and motivates us actively in today's global society.

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Qiang Xiong, aged 46, graduated from the Department of English of Peking University, is currently associate professor of English of the School of Foreign Languages of Hunan University. His research field encompasses English lexicology; British and American literature.

