

Student Number: 5504641167

Name: Pimonnat Srichouy

Essay Subject: Confucius

Words Count:1,193 words

If we were to recognize what Confucius and his followers regarded as the most important thing, it would be Jen (pronounced as ren). Jen refers to human connectedness or humanity.¹ Humanity is now the dominant and recurring theme of our era. This accounts for why the Confucian idea can be closely related to contemporary generation and why his principles and method of teaching has prolonged vitality throughout history. The humanistic tendency had been in evidence for so long before his time, but it was Confucius who turned it into the most vigorous driving force in Chinese philosophy and his philosophy aimed at benefiting not only a few selected groups, but all the people of the empire he was a part of. Confucius describes humanity as to love the people, or to love the masses extensively. This inspired him to provide equal opportunities on education and to carry out teaching activities in dialogue with his disciples. The all-embracing development of everyone's potential capacity constitutes the most important part of Confucius' notion of

¹ Wing Tsit-Chan “The Humanism of Confucius” 26 Jan 2013

URL: <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/oal/courses/image/ias2550/humanism.pdf>

humanity. He practiced moral education, intellectual education, physical education and aesthetic education through his 'six art crafts'.² His philosophy originated from his political practice and teaching activity. Based on experience, its principles and methods are pragmatic rather than speculative. Confucius has been honored as an ideal model of virtue and learning by Chinese people for thousands of years. The main document of Confucian philosophy consists in recorded conversation and discourses with his followers or disciples, which is The Analects. Thus it may seem that his lectures sent forth an amiable intimacy, and his philosophic discourses were characterized distinctively by an element of feeling. And in that time his philosophy could only be empiricism with no artificiality brought forth by the special situation rather than a great collection of speculative metaphysics.³

Confucius, the great Chinese sage, His own name was Kong, but his disciples called him Kong-fu-tse, (Kong the Master) and the Jesuit missionaries Latinized into Confucius.⁴ From his early age, he had an extraordinary love of learning, and veneration for the ancient laws of his country. The main idea of Confucian philosophy is Jen or humanity, Confucius explained Ren as to love people," one could not love only his

² Author: Chinakongzi "The Story of Confucius" 26 Jan 2013

URL: <http://www.chinakongzi.com/2550/eng/biography.html>

³ David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames. Thinking Through Confucius 1987 p. 110-114, 138, 146-148

⁴ Chinakongzi "The Story of Confucius" 26 Jan 2013

URL: <http://www.chinakongzi.com/2550/eng/biography.html>

parents, brothers, sisters and sons," but ought to love the masses extensively.⁵ Here, the "masses" did not indicate certain kind of people. Its basic meaning is like what Buddha said of saving all the living creatures and Christ said of loving all the people including your enemy. When his stables were burnt down, on returning from court, Confucius asked if anyone was hurt. He did not ask about the horses, those he asked about might be his home slaves to whom he had never discriminated, on the other hand, he showed outstanding concern and love to them. As a result, his principle of humanity is both the foundation of his philosophy and basis of his behavior.

This humanity principle was carried onward continuously by his followers. One of his followers Zixia said, "all people on the earth are brothers, why should a gentleman worry about shortage of brothers?"⁶ Mencius later related this admiring-heart spirit as to respect one's elders and extend this respect to the other's elders, love one's youngsters and extend this love to the other's youngsters. During the past thousands of years, this universal love spirit has spread throughout the cultural tradition of the nation, become maxims of life known to everybody. These maxims fell through history, and finally came

⁵ David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames. Thinking Through Confucius 1987

p. 110-114, 138, 146-148

⁶ The Analects of Confucius : A Philosophical Translation. Roger T. Ames 2553
p.218-221

to be Dr. Sun Yet-Sen's slogan Universal Love.⁷ In modern life, this slogan acts as an idea bridge leading to exchange with the world. The theoretical basis of this humanity philosophy was stated as never do to others what you would not like them to do to you, that is, whatever you do or say must be examined from other people's angle, and in a positive way as if you would like to be. In the presence of humanity, only by continuous effort in practice without slack can lead one to the ideal personality of humanism. Once you face the test of life and death, those who devote themselves to humanity will not seek to live by impairing humanity and will even sacrifice themselves protecting humanity. With the encouragement of Confucian words, countless Chinese men and women brought forward wave upon wave to sacrifice for the country, thereby strengthen the bond of the nation.⁸

Confucius's broad mind also enable him to live through rough days smoothly during the circumscribe in Chen and Cai, later he said, 'With coarse food to eat, cold water to drink, and the blended arm as a pillow, happiness may still exist'.⁹ These words

⁷ Peimin Ni. On Confucius 2002 p. 46-51

⁸ David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames. Thinking Through Confucius 1987 p. 110-114, 138, 146-148

⁹ The Analects of Confucius : A Philosophical Translation. Roger T. Ames 2553 p.218-221

truly describe the fervent heart in the hard time of life. Confucius has an account in his own words on his behaving, He is so eager for work that he often forgets to eat, his happiness in his pursuit of knowledge is so exceptional that he often forgets his troubles. He did not care to talk about spiritual beings or even about life after death. Instead, believing that man can make the Way (Tao) great, not that the Way can make the man great.¹⁰ He concentrated on man. His primary concern was a good society based on good government and harmonious human relations. To this end he supported a good government that rules by virtue and morality rather than by unreasonable punishment or force. His judgement for goodness was righteousness as opposed to profit. For the family, he particularly stressed filial piety and for society in general, proper conduct or property.¹¹

Love and respect are principles that were practiced in the framework of the society and humanity as a whole and equality was not necessarily the goal of a just society. Confucius was not interested in individual salvation or individual rights. What he cared about most was the collective well being of society and humanity. He advocated virtues such as courtesy, selflessness, dutifulness, respect, diligence, shared obligation, working or volunteering for common good, social harmony, and empathy. The code of behavior

¹⁰ The Analects of Confucius : A Philosophical Translation. Roger T. Ames 2553 p.218-221

¹¹ David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames. Thinking Through Confucius 1987 p. 110-114, 138, 146-148

from the perspective of Confucius is based on a system of harmonious and subordinate relationships which derived from beliefs pertaining to piety, an efficient family, an efficient nation and an efficient world.