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The “Good” and “The Good Life”: Confucius and Christ

David Lyle Jeffrey

Abstract

The Golden Rule is the ethical point most frequently compared in Jesus and Confucius;¹ in each case, what is recommended is reconsideration of one's own actions toward other people in the light of an imaginative projection of how it would be if the roles were reversed. The formulations in both look substantively identical.² Yet the positive formulation of Jesus and the negative formulation of Confucius actually shape the substance and import of the precept in distinctive ways. Moreover, there may be a deeper level at which, while they are certainly not contradictory, these two formulations are expressions of an important register of ontological difference. Engaged thoughtfully, they nonetheless afford to ethical modeling an opportunity for “harmony in diversity,” complementarity rather than mere equivalence. I argue here that the two traditions can be mutually enhancing, each through knowledge of and sympathy for the other.

Keywords

agape – *Analects* – Beatitudes – *eudaimonia* – Golden Rule – harmony in diversity – reciprocity – *ren*

* David Lyle Jeffrey is the Distinguished Professor of Literature and the Humanities, Institute for Studies of Religion, Baylor University, Waco, TX, USA; and guest professor at the Faculty of Foreign Language and Literature, Peking University, Beijing, China; e-mail: david_jeffrey@baylor.edu.

1 Luke 6:31; Matthew 7:12. cf. Arthur Waley, trans., *Sacred Writings: Confucianism, The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 5-11, 15-23.

2 *Analects*, 12.2; Luke 6:31.



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Shining Ideal and Uncertain Reality: Commentaries on the “Golden Rule” in Confucianism and Other Traditions

Andrew H. Plaks

Abstract

This paper considers a number of problematic issues underlying the seemingly unassailable truth of moral philosophy expressed in the “Golden Rule” in a variety of cultural spheres. These issues include the place of this teaching within its given religious or philosophical context, the defense of this principle as an inviolable tenet of revealed dogma or as a piece of utilitarian advice for the regulation of social life, the manner in which the precise rhetorical structure of a given formulation reflects the specific intellectual underpinnings of its cultural milieu, claims of universal validity as a statement of moral truth for all men and all time or as a culture-specific value understood to apply exclusively within a particular religious community, and modes of commentarial expansion by scriptural exegetes and textual scholiasts seeking to ground this teaching within the logic of philosophical or theological discourse. After outlining several points of uncertainty that emerge in the context of transferring the ideal of human empathy to the messy reality of concrete existence, we then turn to a number of attempts by leading commentators in the Confucian, rabbinic, and other scholastic traditions to grapple with these contradictions and to reconcile them within the framework of their respective value systems.

Keywords

cultural comparison – Confucianism – Golden Rule – Judaism

* Andrew Plaks is a professor of Chinese and Japanese classical literature, Asian Department, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel; e-mail: aplaks@princeton.edu.



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Confucian Tradition, Modernization, and Globalization

Yao Xinzhong

Abstract

Drawing on important theories on tradition and modernization that developed in the past few decades, this article is intended to argue against two extreme views concerning tradition and modernity, one propagating that modernization intrinsically precludes tradition and the other claiming that, to uphold tradition, we must reject modernity. Applying the “circular model” of tradition and modernity and the paradigm of “long tradition,” we contend that tradition and modernity comprise and supplement each other and that, together, they form a continuum in the process of modernization, in contrast to the widespread view that modernization breaks away from tradition. We further examine critically various proposals on the usefulness of tradition for modern life and on the value of Confucian ethics for modernization in China. By arguing that tradition must not be separated from modernity and must be seen as part of modernization, this article concludes that only by including tradition will modernization be sustainable and that Confucian ethics can play an important role in reshaping the moral landscape of China in the rapidly modernized and globalized age.

Keywords

Confucian ethics – globalization – modernization – tradition

* Yao Xinzhong is a professor of philosophy and head of the Department of Philosophy, Renmin University, Beijing, China; e-mail: yao.xinzhong@ruc.edu.cn. This article derives in part from an M.A. course jointly taught by Ralph Parfect and the author at King's College London. The author thanks Dr. Parfect for his contribution to the course and his work on the lecture notes. Further research on this article was supported by a research grant from Southeast University.



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Under Western Eyes: Critical Reflections on the Confucius Revival

Richard Wolin

Abstract

The economic opening up of China has paved the way for a renaissance of thought and scholarship, and Confucianism, while still not considered the “national religion,” has regained its place as the heart of Chinese humanities and academic debate. It has even transcended the academic arena and has become a social phenomenon. But to what extent is this resurgence a natural response to a changing society, the response of a populace that is possibly growing averse to looking toward the West for answers, and to what extent is it politically driven? When put in its proper historical and cultural context, we can see that this revival of Confucian thought and of Confucius as a national idol is very much a tool wielded by the government to promote its own goals, namely, to foster a stronger sense of national identity, unity, and obedience under the name of harmony. Now that China’s modernization has become a fact, many questions remain regarding how its government and its society will reconcile modernization and Westernization with its rich Confucian heritage. This paper aims to elucidate some of these questions.

Keywords

Confucianism – revival – modernization – ideology

The Confucius Revival is undoubtedly one of the most noteworthy features of contemporary Chinese cultural and intellectual life. In China today, the signs of Confucius’ popularity are omnipresent. Yu Dan’s nonscholarly

* Richard Wolin is the Distinguished Professor of History and Political Science at CUNY Graduate Center, New York, USA; e-mail: rwolin@gc.cuny.edu.



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Competing Paradigms in the Dialogue Among Civilizations: Core Values vs. Universal Values

Xie Wenyu

Translated by Colleen Howe

Abstract

The model of universal values and civilizational transformation, on the one hand, and the model of core values and self awareness, on the other, represent two fundamentally opposing paradigms of dialogue among civilizations. In practice, the former represents an attempt to present the core values of Western civilization as universal values and to demand that non-Western civilizations assimilate to these so-called universal values. Thus the promotion of universal values runs the risk of exacerbating intercivilizational conflict and preventing non-Western civilizations from achieving a deep understanding of the core values of their cultures, even concealing the shortcomings of their own value systems. The paradigm of core values and self awareness, by contrast, emphasizes the importance of retaining innate values and ethics, allowing civilizations to evaluate and update their own value systems as needed. We would therefore do well to adopt core values and self-awareness as the dominant model for dialogue among civilizations.

Keywords

core values – dialogue among civilizations – responsibility consciousness – universal values

Intercultural contact refers to the process of interactions initiated as soon as two different cultures come into contact with each other. This interaction comes in many different forms, ranging from violent conflict to mutual influence, unidirectional influence, and even cultural genocide. In a broad sense,

* Xie Wenyu is a professor of philosophy at the School of Philosophy and Social Development, Shandong University, Jinan, China; e-mail: wenyuxie@yahoo.com.



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A Comparison of Filial Piety in Ancient Judaism and Early Confucianism

Fu Youde and Wang Qiangwei

Translated by Noah Lipkowitz

Abstract

Filial piety is one of the most comparable ethical elements in the Jewish and Confucian traditions, both of which possess a clear overall ethical orientation. Ancient Judaism and early Confucianism advocate extremely similar expressions of filial piety, such as providing for and respecting one's parents, inheriting their legacy, properly burying and mourning them, and tactful remonstrance of elders. However, ancient Judaism and early Confucianism differ on the degree to which one should be filial, the scope of filial piety, and its status within each respective ethical system. Confucianism advocates a more comprehensive and nuanced version of respect for parents than Judaism, while both systems hold distinctive views regarding the extent and scope of filial piety. Both traditions advocate similar kinds of filial piety primarily because they are based on bonds of familial affection and gratitude, and their differences are cultural in nature. Two such decisive cultural factors are Judaism's theocentrism and Confucianism's humanism. Furthermore, the different social institutions and systems of governance brought about by these cultural differences account for the dissimilarities in Jewish and Confucian filial piety. The transcendent nature and emphasis on equality between individuals inherent in Judaism can play an informative role in the revival and reestablishment of Confucian ethics.

Keywords

Confucianism – filial piety – Judaism

* Fu Youde is a professor of religious studies, Department of Philosophy, and head of Center for Judaic and Interreligious Studies, Shandong University, Jinan, China; e-mail: ydfu@sdu.edu.cn. Wang Qiangwei is a doctoral candidate at the Center for Judaic and Interreligious Studies, Shandong University; e-mail: sdu_wqw@163.com.



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On China's Challenge to American Hegemony

Tan Mingran

Abstract

China's rise has brought about various propositions about its role in the future global order. Based on a dozen influential scholars' works, this essay first summarizes the supposed economic, political, and cultural challenges China will pose for America and then analyzes their sustainability. Like Martin Jacques, it insists that China will not be able to catch up with America using a resource-intensive model. And China cannot expand using this model through technological upgrades either, for, as a power-oriented culture, China cannot train disinterested scientists to be truly engaged in technological upgrades. Nevertheless, China has alarmed the West as it seeks a way to deal with its rise. My position is that, as China and America become more economically interdependent, the best way is to achieve mutual benefit through peaceful dialogue and establish a world culture that integrates Chinese tradition and American democracy, for maintaining American universalism and containing China by preserving U.S. military superiority are unsustainable.

Keywords

America – Beijing Consensus – challenge – China – Washington Consensus

As China's economic and political influence has increased around the world, it has increasingly drawn the attention of European and American scholars and politicians. For the first time in American history, China's rise became a topic of debate in the 2012 presidential election, in which each candidate described how he would counter China's growing claims in the South China Sea and other disputed territories and how he would handle trade tensions

* Tan Mingran is a professor of philosophy, Department of Philosophy and Social Development, Shandong University, Jinan, China; e-mail: tanmingran@sdu.edu.cn.



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Communicating Civilization Through Rituals: Mount Tai Pilgrimages in Song China, 960-1279

Han Lifeng

Abstract

This paper examines the imperial *feng* 封 and *shan* 禪 ritual at Mount Tai in 1008 and its connection with popular pilgrimages among the Mount Tai cult. It aims to demonstrate how ritual can be used as a tool of the imperial state in communicating its political and cultural agenda.

Placing the imperial pilgrimage within its historical context at the turn of the eleventh century, it can be understood as an effort to secure mass identification with the state and its authority. More importantly, it could be used to establish ownership of Chinese civilization by the Song dynasty (960-1279) in its competition with the Khitan, who had long adopted Chinese institutions and ideology. Various strategies were deployed by the throne to communicate the imperial symbolism of the mountain. The mountain, therefore, had become valuable symbolic capital. Through the composition of temple inscriptions, the literati were able to redefine the popular ritual practices of the Mount Tai cult and brought them into a hegemonic discourse on the mountain. This facilitated the construction of an imperial cultural identity accessible to all social groups and allowed an abstract concept of Chinese culture to be communicated through the fabric of society.

Keywords

communication – *feng* and *shan* ritual – pilgrimage – symbolism

* Han Lifeng is a lecturer at the School of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China; e-mail: lhug@outlook.com

Rethinking “Traditions”: Reading the Classics as Ritual

Shen Yang

Abstract

How do generations of Chinese remain connected across history? How do the anthropological studies of religion help us to reconceptualize the realm of sociality and historicity? This paper argues that reading the classics is a ritual to bring together many heterogeneous traditions in a subjunctive historical community. In the Chinese context, reading is first done aloud in the presence of other people, in what can be broadly envisioned as a teacher-student relationship. Reading as such is rhythmic, public, and historical, by which both the deceased and the yet-to-be-born are brought together by readers' embodied acceptance of “sages.” Thus “traditions” in China could be discussed more in terms of orthopraxy than orthodoxy. This perspective of reading suggests one is capable of understanding by “doing” rather than by “thinking” alone; and reading activities serve not only to regenerate but also to create new relationships among and between contemporaries and their historical relatives.

Keywords

Historical community – reading classics – ritual tradition

* Yang Shen is a Ph.D. candidate in anthropology, Boston University, Boston, USA; e-mail: ysanthro@bu.edu. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Young Scholars' Conference, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India, February 5, 2014. I am grateful to colleagues there for their questions and comments. I thank Prof. Chang Yuan, Prof. Rob Weller, Zhang Wenjie, Zhang Jieke, Yin Yadi, and Wang Xingyi for conversations that greatly benefited this paper. Suggestions made by the editors of *Joch* are also appreciated. Many other colleagues have kindly read my manuscripts. I am grateful for their generosity and hope I can address their suggestions adequately in future papers.